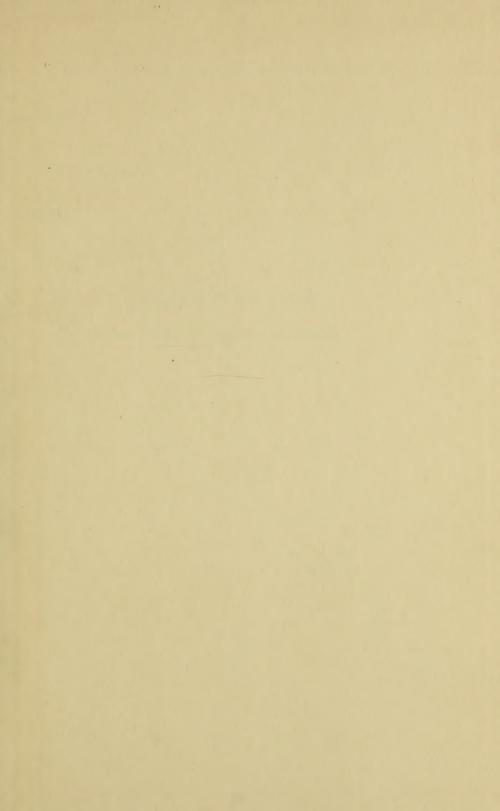


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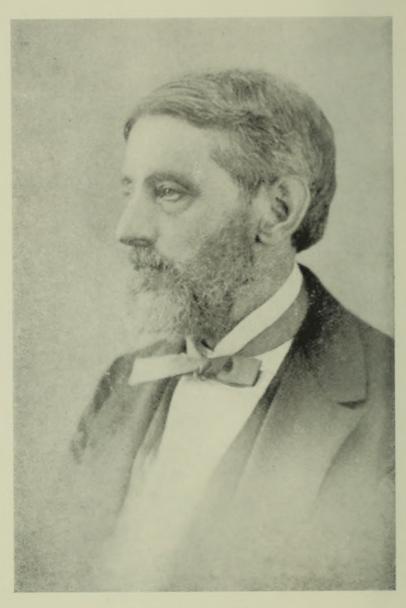


JAMES PARTON

The Father of Modern Biography

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JAMES PARTON

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The Father of Modern Biography

MILTON E. FLOWER



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For
My Mother



FOREWORD

THE PREPARATION of any scholarly book necessitates help from many sources: people and libraries, friends and collectors. Writing biography demands interpretation of the subject in addition to available materials. This life of James Parton is no exception. The man himself was a rewarding discovery, and the many associations made in my research have helped ease

the task of study and writing.

Professor Allan Nevins of Columbia University, whose suggestion this subject was, has from the beginning shown unflagging interest and been of greatest assistance. His keen perception and encouragement have made the task a pleasure. The Parton family were generous and ever willing to help. To James Parton for opening up the large untapped collection of family papers dealing with his grandfather, I am in debt for the unquestioning and free latitude he gave me in my study. The late Miss Ethel Parton was equally kind and became an invaluable source of personal recollections. Two visits with her in old Newburyport were memorable. Mr. Hugo Parton was similarly kind in attention to any query I had. What impressed me most about the Partons was their intelligent attitude toward pure research and the lack of pressure as to my findings. My mother, Lenore Embick Flower, has always been solicitous and forbearing when sledding was sometimes rough, but more than that she is an able critic whose suggestions have always been gratefully received. To these, then, I owe most in appreciation.

The rich store of library materials have added immeasurably to my story. The Huntington Memorial Library, the Harvard University Library, the New York Public Library have been particularly valuable in their Parton manuscripts. The Library of Congress, the Boston Public Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Pennsylvania Historical Society have been no less kind with their aid and permissions. The librarians and staffs of these libraries and collections have helped with many services.

There are many more who have also aided me along the way.

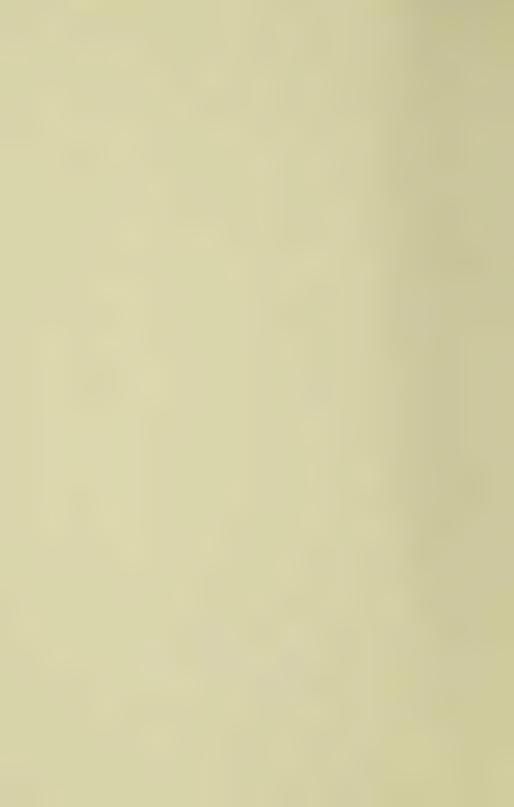
These include Mrs. Will Rainey, Mrs. A. M. Bumann, and Miss Kate Haney, distant relatives of the Partons; Miss May Morris, librarian at Dickinson College; Miss Mary Benjamin; Mrs. Joseph Carr; Gilbert Chinard; and the late Carl Van Doren.

MILTON E. FLOWER

Dickinson College Carlisle, Pennsylvania

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JAMES PARTON

The Father of Modern Biography



INTRODUCTION

TAMES PARTON was a leading American biographer, jour-I nalist, and social crusader of the nineteenth century. Today, except to social and literary historians, his name is unknown. This is a curious fact, for he was our first professional biographer and for thirty years a prolific contributor to the chief magazines in this country.

From the appearance of the Life of Horace Greeley in 1854 to his final work on Voltaire in 1881, his biographies earned him success and prominence. He extended the scholarly research methods introduced by Jared Sparks and, in addition, endowed his works with a vitality which made them eminently readable. His Horace Greeley established a precedent,1 for it was the first biography, aside from campaign lives, written of a living person. His second choice of subject, Aaron Burr, was likewise a departure, disregarding the convention that biography should deal only with inspirational heroes. These books and their successors gave an impetus to biographic writing in this country which proved irresistible. A contemporary in the Atlantic Monthly, commenting on the new trends, pointed out that privacy was a dead issue and that no one was eliminated as a subject.2 Whether he wrote of Andrew Jackson, Benjamin Franklin, General Benjamin Butler, or Thomas Jefferson, by combining the creative sense of the literary man with the reportorial sense of the journalist, Parton made his characters vivid and clear; yet always they were based on sound facts laboriously gathered together.

Beginning his journalistic career as writer and editorial assistant on N. P. Willis's Home Journal, he became a contributor to Robert Bonner's New York Ledger after the appearance of his first biography. In 1864, when his Life of Benjamin Franklin was published, Parton was asked to contribute to the North American Review, then under the editorship of Charles Eliot Norton and James Russell Lowell. After several years of continuous writing for that journal, he became a writer for the Atlantic Monthly, first under James T. Fields and later under William Dean Howells. For ten years he was the most frequent contribu-

¹ Dictionary of American Biography, XIV, 279. ² Gail Hamilton, "The New School of Biography," Atlantic Monthly, XIV (Nov., 1864), 580.

tor to that magazine, which was then at the height of its fame. His nonhistorical articles were timely and entertaining, ranging from accounts of the government in Washington to descriptions of leading industries. The latter set a style much copied by other

magazines of the period.

Parton was a fearless crusader. His pamphlets were trenchant, exposing misdeeds and corruption in clear and convincing fashion. He attacked monopoly control, government evils, and slum housing, while he vigorously supported measures which he felt needed wider presentation to the public. His activity in certain movements earned him a reputation as a radical. He supported the cause of labor when labor was tightly held in rein; a confessed agnostic, he championed the rights of freethinkers because of a passionate belief in the right of individual expression rather than from admiration for their cause.

Parton has been described as the first author to earn a living exclusively by his writings.³ Until his time literary men were dependent upon inherited wealth or other work to supplement their income. At his peak he earned between six and eight thousand dollars a year, a considerable sum in those days. The struggle was difficult, and eventually he was forced to exchange a select literary audience and smaller pay for a popular one with more generous emoluments. Yet even Parton could point to three years of lecturing which bought him valuable time for research on Voltaire.

His position as a writer in New York and contributor to Boston publications gave him contacts with noted contemporaries. He engaged in varied activities such as the international copyright movement, civil service reform, the Free Religious Association, and many others. He figured in headline events of that day. While married to Fanny Fern (Sara Willis Eldredge), one of the first women columnists, he became embroiled in a dispute with Walt Whitman, possibly abetted by her. With her he gave support to woman's rights and the formation of the first woman's club. Parton was the first to encourage Harriet Beecher Stowe to reveal the Lord Byron scandal, and he became the center of an attack after writing an article on the daily press, accusing newspapers and reporters of misrepresentation.

Modern biographers, writing seventy-five years later on the same men Parton presented to his public, have discovered lasting

³ Writer, II (May, 1888), 103.

merit in his work. Albert Jay Nock, referring to the excellence of Parton's Jefferson, lamented the difficulty of procuring copies of his books,⁴ for notwithstanding the many printings, the biographies are hard to come by. Marquis James in his monumental work on Jackson has given generous praise to Parton's "enduring popularity," his "contribution to our knowledge of Jackson and to the art of biography," and above all, the reality with which he endowed Jackson.⁵ Carl Van Doren, the author of the definitive life of Franklin, equally generous with his praise of Parton's biography, called it still the best work on that hero though superseded at points by later research.⁶

The prominence once enjoyed by Parton and his works raises questions as to the eclipse of his fame. The critical appreciations of present-day authorities are added reasons for an extended evalu-

ation of Parton and his writing.

Even in Parton's time an impressive list of New England worthies tended to overshadow their contemporaries elsewhere, at least so far as the judgment of the literary elite was concerned. The stately prose of certain New England writers or the austere and thin quality in the writing of others tended to make Parton's easygoing style seem in questionable taste and overly vivid. There was also a tendency on the part of New England writers to form a closed circle of their own. Still later the impact of European scholarship upon American historical writing obscured the merit of Parton's work. His lack of academic training was obvious, but if one criticized the lack of documented references, one could not ignore the extended bibliographies which he added as appendices to his works. Especially remarkable were those included in the volumes on Jackson, Franklin, and Voltaire.

Certain other aspects doubtless contributed to criticism of a detrimental character. Four of the seven men about whom Parton wrote needed to be rescued from public opprobrium—Voltaire above all, then, in turn, Burr, Butler, and Jackson. His judicial tone toward his subjects was in marked contrast to popular judgment. Only in the volume on General Butler did Parton abandon his usual strong moral convictions regarding his subject. The

⁵ Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, the Border Captain (Indianapolis, 1933),

p. 429.

⁴ Alfred Jay Nock, Jefferson (New York, 1926), p. 333. For additional appraisals of Parton's various biographies by later authorities, see the chapter dealing with the individual work.

⁶ Carl Van Doren, Benjamin Franklin (New York, 1926), p. 787.

Life of Horace Greeley was his only other biography of a living person, but Greeley was not a compelling personality to Parton. Butler, on the other hand, was magnetic and charmed his biog-

rapher.

Early in the 1870's Parton became an active supporter of two radical groups, the Free Religious Association and the Free Thinkers Association. The first had a tone of respectability; the second did not. This latter organization, which came to lose the support of Robert Ingersoll, never failed to enlist the aid of Parton. His membership became a matter of principle, and though his interest waned, it never ceased. The coupling of the author's name with such movements created suspicious doubt in conservative groups, bulwarks of national thought. Parton was justly accused of dragging free thought doctrine into his Jefferson, and he did so with labored effect. His increasingly dogmatic viewpoint often destroyed the effectiveness of his magazine contributions.

When Parton retired to Newburyport in 1874, he removed himself from the writing centers in which he had been active. For five years he devoted himself to his chef d'œuvre, the Life of Voltaire, a devotion few Americans of his day regarded as praiseworthy, and his name disappeared from the pages of the noted periodicals. In the last decade of his life he became a staff writer for the Youth's Companion, for which he wrote weekly articles. He had burned himself out. Never strong physically, he welcomed surcease from heavier creative efforts. Perhaps these factors culminating in the last twenty years of his life tended to overshadow the larger and more impressive contributions made to literary history in his first two decades of writing.

As a man Parton was wholly delightful. Sympathetic to every good cause, he was as courageous as he was generous in his support of them. No associate ever complained of his good intentions. William Dean Howells spoke for them all when he described the glow of warmth in his personality and his understanding, which was all encompassing. As a writer Parton deserves renewed appreciation, an evaluation which stems from a study of

his work and of the man himself.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

AS THE BOAT carrying Ann Parton and her four children approached America, this young English widow must have been filled with conflicting emotions. Starting anew in a strange country is always difficult, but in 1827 the transplanting of a fatherless family was hazardous indeed. Alfred, the eldest, was only seven, followed by James, Ann, and the year-old Mary.¹

The new country presented a bewildering spectacle. New winds were blowing across America,² and the coming years were to intensify the pattern of life which the country was beginning to form. Of the four children, five-year-old James Parton was to become a pioneer in the field of biography, a crusader for honesty in government, and a pathfinder in the realm of social betterment.

П

James Parton was born February 9, 1822, in Canterbury, England. The Parton family had lived in the cathedral town since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, when Pierre Parton and other French farmers were routed from their lands and found refuge there.³

The émigrés from France were an industrious people, and James Parton later described them as "all prolific, good people of plain ways, and with a marked tendency to liberal opinions." Seven generations after the first Parton's purchase, the land and the mill of the first Pierre were held by Peter Parton, 4 a direct descendant and grandfather of the writer James.

Parton was the son of James Parton and Ann Dearling. Ann's father, John, was chief hostler of the George and Dragon Inn in Canterbury, but his wife, Hannah Leach Dearling, was the real

2 See Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, Vol. VI of A History of

American Life, Schlesinger and Fox, eds. (New York, 1927).

8 Currier, Ould Newbury, p. 689.

*Boston Globe clipping, n.d., interview with James Redpath on Parton, ca. March 4, 1880 (Parton Collection).

¹ Family records here and later are from the Parton Family Collection; from other descendants of Ann Parton, Mrs. A. M. Bumann and Mrs. Will Rainey; also John J. Currier, *Ould Newbury* (Boston, 1896).

ruler of the family. By all accounts she was unlettered, but her mental vigor and strength of character were remarkable. Straight and strong, with snapping eyes, she left an indelible impression

on the minds of her children and grandchildren.5

As the wife of James Parton, Ann endured many hardships. Following her marriage in 1815, children came in rapid succession. Two died almost immediately after birth. In July, 1826, her young husband died, and Ann was left with five small children, one of whom died shortly afterwards. The next year Ann Parton, probably influenced by a married sister, Sarah, who had found life more promising in America, decided to leave England. George and Sarah Edwards had settled in Philadelphia, but Mrs. Parton turned her eyes toward New York.

III

America in 1827 exhibited the restlessness of youth. Politically and socially the old aristocracy was being replaced by groups who found new avenues to success and fortune. Jackson's election the following year showed new influences: the Western pioneer had become a permanent political factor, new voters in the East evidenced the triumph of "the common man." The people were in the ascendant. The factory system with expanding capitalism had created a new social order. Old Hickory's inauguration and the departure of John Quincy Adams symbolized more than a change of administration.

New York was a bustling city of 190,000, still clinging to the tip of Manhattan, not yet extended into numbered and well-patterned streets. The Battery, with its tree-shaded gravel walks and its ever-pleasant prospect, Parton later described as "the most enchanting public ground on earth." Commerce, however, rapidly was encroaching upon old residential sections, and a few streets such as Wall and Pearl were devoted to special trading interests. Material wealth and a growing spirit of enterprise were

evident everywhere.8

This was the city to which Ann Parton brought her children,

⁵ Family Records (Parton Collection).

These five children were, according to the family genealogy, Alfred, 1820-1840; James, born Feb. 9, 1822; Ann, 1823-1893; Elizabeth, 1825-1827; Mary, 1826-1871.

⁷ James Parton, "Outgrown City Government," Forum, II (Feb., 1880), 541.
⁸ Timothy Flint, History and Geography of the Mississippi Valley to which is appended a condensed Physical Geography of the Atlantic United States (Cincinnati, 1832), II, 49-50.



Courtesy New York Public Library

NEW YORK BATTERY IN 1832



and it quickly erased Canterbury from their minds. They never, however, quite forgot the quick black eyes of their grandmother or old Peter Parton, dusty with flour in his white miller's garb. Remembered also, through countless tellings, was the family joke about James, aged four, who drained the dregs of wine glasses left by his elders after a convivial evening and was put to bed quite groggy.⁹

IV

Within a year after her arrival in New York, Mrs. Parton married William Henry Pillow, also an emigrant from Canterbury. Not many years later the Parton children had three new brothers to play with, one of whom was born in England, whither the mother had returned for a visit in 1836.

William H. Pillow lived with his family at Number I Chrystie Street at the corner of Division—the same building which housed his business of straw-hat presser. It was a neighborhood of meandering streets bordered by neat brick houses stubbornly resisting the inroads of commerce. No section of New York presented a more kaleidoscopic picture than neighboring Chatham Square and the Bowery. The Bowery was the people's Broadway; it was lined with shops and was a thoroughfare for clattering country stages. Mr. Pillow's hat shop, like similar establishments, prospered in the region. 11

James Parton's childhood was that of an average New York boy of his time. The family means were slender, but the Partons made frequent excursions around New York. Trips to Elizabethtown, Williamsburg, and the rocky stretches of upper Manhattan were selected for family holidays and furnished opportunity for boisterous exploration. The Parton boys often ventured to the swamps along the East River, where they picked their way with caution. From these open stretches, as James later recalled, "Brooklyn Heights could be seen, bold, abrupt, a line of bluffs of yellow earth without a building of any kind from Fulton Ferry to where the South Ferry now is. The beach below the heights

⁹ As told by James Parton to his family.

¹⁰ Longworth's New York Directory for 1841-42 (New York), p. 491. This address continues for a decade. See also Doggett's New York City Directory for 1850-51 (New York, 1850), p. 400.

¹¹ Cornelius Mathews, A Pen and Ink Panorama of New York City (New

York, 1853), pp. 124-125.

¹² Album of Ann Parton, in possession of Mrs. Will Rainey, dated 1837-1841.

was the popular bathing place for those boys of New York who

could muster four cents to pay ferriage."13

Theaters tempted James and Alfred. Sometimes the brothers, sneaking off to visit favorite playhouses along the Bowery, would dash home between acts to show innocent faces and then rush back to see the play's end.14 Short Spanish cigars selling at two for a cent were smoked by the youngsters far from the parental door. Tobacco early became an enduring habit, though in times of financial stringency the boys smoked rattan.15

And there was, of course, school.

After seven years in the public schools of New York City, young James was sent to White Plains to study at the well-known Academy of John Swinburne. 16 He was not precocious, but the fact that the family singled him out for this special education testifies to his eager interest in books. There was a legend that he once begged his mother to allow him to become a barber that he might have abundant leisure between customers for his study of Greek.¹⁷ An inheritance from his father helped make the Academy possible. The school was excellent and its influence lasting. Later, when Parton established his own school, he modeled it on Swinburne's.18

There was much work in composition. Among the topics treated by Parton in papers that have been preserved are "Modern Deception," an attack on the new "science" of phrenology; 19 "The Pyramids of Europe"; "Nelson, the Hero"; "The Diversity of Nature"; and "The Internal Resources of America." These papers of 1837 and 1838 were not altogether the stilted efforts of a typical schoolboy, for the style seems to foreshadow the ready pen of later years.20

13 "Outgrown City Government," p. 541. 14 Told by James Parton to his family.

15 James Parton, "Living Your Life Over," Philadelphia Public Ledger, Jan.

1, --? (clipping, Parton Collection).

16 Currier, Ould Newbury, p. 689. The White Plains Academy, incorporated by the Legislature in 1828, was located on the west side of Broadway in that village. John Swinburne, its second headmaster, a popular and successful instructor, held the principalship until 1840. See J. T. Scharf, History of Westchester County (Philadelphia, 1886), I, 737.

17 "James Parton," Library of the World's Best Literature, ed. Charles Dudley

Warner (New York, 1902), XIX, 1123.

¹⁸ Undated and untitled newspaper clipping (Parton Collection).

10 Oddly enough, that pseudo-scientific subject which was the object of Parton's schoolboy ridicule was later to attract his serious interest; in some of his earlier biographies he drew upon phrenology for evidence of his subjects' talents.

30 Papers dated 1837 and 1838 (Parton Collection).

A notable incident of these Academy years was the reception tendered President Van Buren as he passed through White Plains. In a letter dated July 11, 1839, James wrote enthusiastically to his New York schoolmate Benjamin M. Stillwell, describing in great detail preparations for the event and its success:

Hurray for Martin Van Buren! I have shaken hands with him, yes, my paw has been in contact with the hand of him whose arm wields the sceptre of this United Kingdom. All the boys were presented to him, and Miss June's girls.21

Young James had hoped to attend college after graduation from the Academy, but lack of money prevented his doing so.²² He received, however, an appointment as librarian and instructor at the White Plains Academy, which had, in addition to the principal, three assistants and sixty-three pupils.²³ As a member of the staff at White Plains, Parton had opportunities to read and study under the guidance of the older teachers.

At the age of twenty-one, having received a legacy of fifteen hundred dollars, Parton made a trip to England. His nearest kinsman was a first cousin living in the Kentish village of Tenterden, and Parton spent a week with him. He found the family kind and considerate, but life on the small English farm struck him as rather dull.24 He visited the old cathedral of Canterbury, and there he found both "beauty and fascination."25 London that year was fresh with the gaiety of the early Victorian era. The Duke of Wellington still rode through the streets, and like the Londoners Parton bowed as the old man passed. The young Queen, "a very pretty girl," often cantered about the Park on a black horse. This was a new world, a land where tradition ran deep and famous personages were seen on daily promenades. Parton heard The Messiah sung in Exeter Hall during Lent, a performance attended by the Queen. He was impressed by "the

²¹ James Parton to Benjamin M. Stillwell, New York, July 11, 1839 (Parton Collection). This with the above compositions were returned to Parton in 1886 by Stillwell, then a New York lawyer.

²² Outline by Parton for Scribners, 1861 (MS Collection, New York Public Library).

²³ Catalogue, White Plains Academy, 1840-41 (Brooklyn, 1841).
²⁴ Henry Bruce, "James Parton," Boston Evening Tribune, Oct. 20, 1891,

p. 16.
²⁵ Manuscript of lecture, "Immorality of Religious Capitals" (Parton Collection).

vast audience rising to its feet as if by one electric impulse; the five hundred singers rising also like a cloud; Sir Michael Costa lifting the silver baton; the whole multitude breaking into the National Anthem, and singing its fond and foolish words with a unanimity of heartiness perfectly irresistible, and never to be forgotten." There was a loyalty in that outburst which he later wished might be infused into the republican masses he knew so well.²⁶

Not everything he saw was so full of inspiration. It was something of a shock for the young American to see social inequalities which, as a growing youth, he had never known. The suffering on all sides and the disregard of it by the fortunate classes rankled most. He had seen misery in the streets and slums of New York, but this condition was due less to class barriers and was far less hopeless than in England. Among the places Parton visited was a Union Parish Pauper House. Never before had he seen so much destitution except from vice. The brusque treatment of the inmates did not affect the youth so much as the careful deference and humble obeisance shown toward the visitors. The sight of a poor woman whose son, still a child of fourteen, was torn ruthlessly from her to be sent to India was heartrending. Such an experience, he reported in after years, was almost enough to make him a labor crank.²⁷

These months in England showed Parton the depth of his Americanism and enabled him upon his return to discover his country anew. Looking back on his year abroad, Parton felt it strengthened his creed in a "love of simplicity, an instinct for equality and justice, a hatred for Old World forms and oppressions." Two years later he was to become, formally, an American citizen.

VII

Upon his return Parton turned again to teaching. His mother's sister, Sarah, was still living in Philadelphia with her husband, George Edwards. Mr. Edwards's brother Samuel had followed them to America and subsequently engaged in teaching. He and Parton became coprincipals of an English Classical School on the southwest corner of Penn Square in Philadelphia.²⁹ It consisted

²⁶ Manuscript of lecture, "Republican Nobility" (Parton Collection).
²⁷ Open Court: A Fortnightly Journal, I (April 14, 1887), 114.

²⁸ Boston Evening Tribune, Oct. 20, 1891, p. 16.
²⁰ Report Card, English and Classical School (Parton Collection).

of one large room with Mr. Edwards's desk at the north end and Parton's at the southern end, with a blackboard and a five-foot shelf of books.³⁰

Parton was a good teacher, and he devoted his energies to making the school a success. Samuel Troth, one of his pupils, vividly recalled the years under him.

He spared no effort to make his school a success. From Monday morning until Saturday noon, he toiled in the school rooms. Saturday afternoons, if the weather were fine, he delighted to take us on tramping excursions to places of industrial interest, to Glass Works, Iron Foundries, Ship Yards, Rope Walks or Brickyards, teaching by observation the theories of the books. Or, with the chosen few, he acting as our coxswain, would take us out upon the Schuylkill River and drill us in rowing. Then on Sunday afternoons, I do not remember for how long a period, he taught a Bible Class. . . . His room at his boarding house on Spruce Street, was especially attractive to those of us who were allowed to visit his home, by the curiosities displayed upon the walls and in his cabinet. The variety of tobacco pipes, with odd bowls and long stems, which graced a part of one wall, were looked upon with a feeling akin to envy, by some of the older boys. . . . 31

Philadelphia was marked by the Quaker influence, and many of Parton's pupils belonged to the Society. A gentle person himself, the youthful teacher found the company of Friends congenial, but at times he was provoked at their unconcern with reality. Once at the Troth home there was a discussion of capital punishment, and Parton expressed himself heatedly on the subject. Worried over his outburst of temper, the next morning he wrote Mrs. Troth an apology: "I have been so disgusted at the lax government of this city and at the monstrous cruel and cowardly outrages which weekly occur in consequence, that I can never speak of either that or any similar subject without a very absurd warmth and indignation." 32

VIII

For some time Parton had been beset by religious doubts. The strict piety in which he had been reared had always irked him. The sternness of his mother's creed made him question its value—anything truly good, he reasoned, should breed happiness and light rather than fear and darkness. At White Plains he had

³⁰ Samuel Troth to Miss Ethel Parton, March 10, 1892 (Parton Collection).
31 Samuel Troth to Miss Ethel Parton, Feb. 29, 1892 (Parton Collection).

⁵² James Parton to Mrs. Troth, Wednesday morning, no date (Parton Collection).

observed that religion was often used as a cloak with which to cover misdeeds. These smouldering doubts led to the breakup of the Philadelphia Classical School.

Religious instruction was an integral part of all schooling of the period, whether secular or not. In 1847 and 1848 a series of lectures on religion, "intended to help young persons to a correct belief," was given at the school by Richard Newton, a young Philadelphia clergyman.³³ The lectures were pleasing neither in content nor in delivery. At their conclusion, Parton asked the clergyman some questions which had long troubled him. He received no satisfactory reply, and his perplexity increased. He decided that he could not again open his school with devotions until he had cleared his mind of doubt. Parents immediately bore down upon him, but Parton remained adamant. Edwards pleaded with him in vain. As the pupils were withdrawn one by one, the closing of the school was inevitable.

The Protestant Episcopal Academy found room on its staff for Edwards, but for Parton there was no such opportunity, and he left Philadelphia. The experience was of lasting influence. The lack of charity shown by those who professed to be both upright and liberal led him to question not merely their conduct but the religion they pretended to follow. He resolved that throughout his own life he would try not to fail in understanding for any who might be maligned either by the unreasoning multitude or by an unreasoning group.

³³ Julius H. Ward, "James Parton," New England Magazine, N.S., VII, No. 5 (Jan., 1893), 629.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITERARY APPRENTICE

TN 1848 James Parton returned to New York. The city's popu-I lation now approached the half million mark. Families that had once clung tenaciously to the area of the Battery were now moving farther up the island. As in earlier years, rush and confusion marked the life of downtown New York. Broadway was choked with every sort of omnibus and wagon, while the sidewalks overflowed with businessmen, clerks, and fashionable promenaders.1 Fortunes were amassed overnight. Newly made millionaires crowded the theaters, filled the streets with equipages, and erected homes more notable for cost than for taste.

New York was essentially a commercial city. Nowhere could the traveler find those cultural exhibits of which Boston proudly boasted. Yet the city could point to its newspapers as the best in the country; the daily press had developed here as nowhere else. The finest books, too, were published, if not written, in New York. Harper's and Putnam's had impressive plants, and other firms were soon to be established. New York was still a city which changed as rapidly as a sunset and defied description.

The Parton-Pillow household had also altered. Alfred had died long since, and the sisters had been married-Ann to John Hodges, once a student at the White Plains Academy, who became a Methodist circuit rider in the Middle West, and Mary, the younger sister, to William Henry Rogers. The three stepbrothers

were growing fast.

II

At this time the future of New York's public-school system was unsettled. Between 1849 and 1851 two state referendums were taken on the question of whether such a system was desirable at all.2 Parton, himself the product of an academy, had little sympathy with the growth of the public education movement. He sought, and soon obtained, a post as teacher in a private school.

¹ Mathews, op. cit., p. 52. ² Edward H. Reisner, Evolution of the Common Schools (New York, 1930), pp. 330-332.

The young instructor's work was arduous, but he found much to interest him outside the classroom. Charlotte Brontë's first novel, published under the pseudonym Currer Bell, had recently appeared. Its popularity was immediate, and no question was more hotly debated in literary circles than that of the identity of the author. Was Currer Bell man or woman? One night Parton wrote down what seemed to him conclusive proof that Currer Bell was a woman. He signed his article with the pen name of "Kent," and the next morning he delivered the manuscript to the house on Fourth Street, near Washington Square, which carried on its well-polished doorplate the name "Willis."3

Nathaniel Parker Willis, one of the best-known writers of the period, and George Morris, author of popular songs and poems,4 were coeditors of the weekly Home Journal. The Tribune had once proclaimed: "On topics related to manners, taste and fashion, the Home Journal is justly an oracle"5—and the magazine was never tired of quoting this encomium. For many years its masthead bore this dictum of Goethe: "We should do our utmost to encourage the beautiful, for the useful encourages itself." The Journal, largely because of its editors, had a popularity unap-

proached by any similar publication.6

After Parton had handed his pages to the gray-liveried boy who answered his ring, he regretted his impulse. During the next week and the next, while looking for his article to appear, he felt a "ridiculous mixture of disappointment and relief." On the first Saturday in January, 1850, the suspense was ended. Parton had stopped at a basement shop in the old Astor House to buy the weekly edition. Glancing at it hastily he saw on the front page, in bold letters, the heading "Jane Eyre and Shirley." Willis had written a kind of preface—

⁴ Among them the famous "Woodman, Spare That Tree."
⁵ Home Journal, Dec. 21, 1850, quoting the New York Tribune. See also Anniversary Edition of the Home Journal, Feb. 26, 1896, with letter of recollections by Robert Bonner. This periodical continues as the Town and Country magazine. The Centennial issue of Dec., 1946, has an historical account by Basil Rauch.

James Parton, Triumphs of Enterprise (Hartford, 1871), preface, pp. 13-14, contains the complete story.

⁶ Founded in 1846 as The National Press: A Home Journal, the periodical dropped its original title nine months later for that of the subtitle Home Journal. This large folio of four pages with seven columns to a page lacked the elegant eye appeal of Godey's or Petersen's with their colored fashion plates. It did, however, win a singular place for itself through its weekly commentary. The circulation in the first two decades approximated 30,000.

Our readers will be as much gratified as we have been, with the following most readable and clever analysis of the doubtful point in a subject very much discussed. . . . ⁷

With a feeling he later described as akin to rapture, Parton was impelled to tell someone of his success. The only acquaintance near by was a foreman in the pressroom of the Tribune. He searched him out, and as the man stood there, grimy from examination of a broken boiler, Parton poured out his good fortune.8

Parton's detective work had been ingenious. The young author had penetrated Charlotte Brontë's disguise, finding rather "the vehement, nervous, impetuous force of a great woman, than that placid strength of a great man." The narrative, he argued, progressed through the women of the novel, while the men were dimly sketched. The minute descriptions were those of a woman telling of feminine rather than masculine habits and apparel. Further, Parton found, French was quoted and not Latin. In England, he remembered, men were educated in ancient languages, women in French.9

III

Willis became curious about the writer "Kent," and Parton, having obtained a letter of introduction, knocked one day at Willis's door. He was ushered into a room decorated with a fine display of pictures and bibelots. Willis soon entered-tall, elegant, reddish-haired, wearing a corsair jacket brought back from a Mediterranean cruise. "There was," wrote Parton afterwards, "that graceful and romantic something in his appearance, which was in keeping with his writings and his position." Willis put the awed young man at ease, praised his work, and urged him to continue writing. Explaining that the Home Journal could not pay its contributors, the editor emphasized the honor conferred by the acceptance of articles. Parton left well content.10

Parton enjoyed gaiety, light reading, and theater-going. He was, however, no less given to reflection on weightier matters, and the praise from Willis encouraged him to express his views on some of these. His next contribution to the Home Journal was a series of eleven articles on "Education in New York." The editors printed the articles with these words of commendation:

⁷ Home Journal, Jan. 5, 1850.

Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 15.
Home Journal, Jan. 5, 1850.

¹⁰ Triumphs of Enterprise, pp. 16-17.

To guard any thinking person from passing over them, as commonplace and exhausted topics of the day, we take care to say, that they are from one of the best minds we know and written for a new and noble purpose connected with education. . . . Will our readers take into their minds what is offered over the signature of "Kent" upon our assurance that all he writes, who so calls himself, is well worthy of their attention? 11

These articles ran for five months. Parton, reaching his conclusions from personal experience and observation, considered the little schools and academies that peppered the streets of New York often ill-managed and valueless. Through careless acceptance of references and easy licensing, drones and quacks often won their way as teachers in these schools, while men of talent sought more lucrative rewards in other fields.¹²

... it remains true, as all the parties interested know too well, that teaching, as a life pursuit, for honest and capable persons, is no more. Who has lately heard of a prudent father bringing up a son to this employment? Who has recently known a young man, in these parts, of knowledge and talent, engaging in it, not being compelled or urgently invited thereto by necessity? Who is acquainted with a teacher whom a very moderate inducement would not withdraw from it? 18

Parton disapproved of the new law establishing public schools. Free schools, he felt, would cheapen and degrade education, and a stigma would attach itself to those who attended them. At the same time he acknowledged that the private school was a far from perfect institution, the chief ill being the dependence upon and deference to the parents' pocketbooks.¹⁴

Parton's opposition to free schools was rooted in a genuine fear that the odium then attached to the common schools would persist. A continuance of "pauper" alongside private schools would increase class differences, while complete support of education by the state, he felt, would result in an unbearable tax load.¹⁵

Parton's written commentaries were not confined to education, the drama, and literature. As "an Abolitionist," he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Tribune*, defending the Fugitive Slave Law on the ground of humanity. Firm in his belief that slavery should be abolished, he was convinced that abolition must come about through the Southern states themselves. A slave, he said, had,

¹¹ Home Journal, May 18, 1850.

¹² Ibid., May 25, 1850. ¹⁴ Ibid., June 22, 1850.

¹⁸ Ibid., June 8, 1850. ²⁶ Ibid., July 13, 1850.

as such, with the government behind him, a certain sort of security, but as a fugitive he lost whatever advantages he had as a slave. Flight was wrong in that it took the fugitive from the point where his labors were needed to a place where they were not, and also because it increased the antagonism between the slaves who remained behind. To this argument the *Tribune* replied editorially that the whole question was "Whether blacks ought to be animals or men. If men, then whatever increased their discontent with slavery is good, for it strengthens a manly feeling. . . . We oppose the Fugitive Slave Law because it does not give sufficient guarantees to freedom, while it secures everything to Slavery."

In 1851 we find Parton commending the *Tribune* for its position on the copyright question, and hailing the suggested International Copyright Law as just and advantageous to all parties. He thought that this law would be of the utmost importance to authors on either side of the Atlantic—"Carlyle is more read here than in his own country; Irving is probably read more in England than here"—and urged publishers to put an end to conditions which made their trade hazardous. Magazines had the same problem: "What can Graham do who has to pay, against Harper who

has only to cut and paste?"17

Later in the same year Parton made a plea for the rapid completion of the plans for an enlarged Battery Park. He wrote regretfully of the old days when "Balloons went up from Castle Garden once a week, and when from morn til noon, from noon til dewy eve, and from dewy eve to midnight, the delightful promenade was wont to be thronged with lounging citizens and noisy boys." It was a people's park. "The class of persons who have partly ceased to visit it is the class best able to secure substitutes for sea breeze and the long seawalk. It is still the delight of the working man's family, one hundred thousand within the compass of an evening's walk."

IV

Willis was now troubled with epilepsy, the disease which was to lead to his death. Sorting and reading the many manuscripts which came to the *Home Journal* office required more effort than he could command. In 1852 he offered Parton a position as editorial assistant. Parton was devoted to teaching—years afterwards

¹⁶ New York *Tribune*, July 12, 1851.
¹⁷ Ibid., July 2, 1851.
¹⁸ Ho

¹⁸ Home Journal, Sept. 27, 1851.

he declared that were he an emperor his greatest joy would be to elevate the teacher to the highest rank in his kingdom¹⁹—but he willingly gave it up, for journalism attracted him more and more. The future now seemed assured.

Nathaniel Parker Willis was a glittering star in the literary firmament of the forties and fifties. He was a "recognized arbiter elegantiarum," and his columns were crowded with appeals on

knotty points of etiquette or costume.20

One of Willis's most admirable traits was his encouragement of aspiring young authors. Remembering the kindness shown him by Samuel G. Goodrich, who had published his first sketches,²¹ he helped others in like fashion. Among those in whose first writings he detected some spark of talent were Richard Henry Stoddard, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Bayard Taylor.²² Indeed, the chair Parton occupied as literary assistant once had been held by Edgar Allan Poe when a literary critic in the same office.23 It was a good school for aspiring writers.

Parton paid tribute to the meticulous care with which Willis wrote every article.24 No paragraph was printed which was not first read and reread, polished and repolished, until each word had been treated, tested, and approved. Parton's salary was ten dollars a week.²⁵ Small as this was, it gave him greater security than he had had as a teacher. His literary efforts, which hitherto had been remunerated only by theater tickets and "passes," now

were his livelihood.

The first year brought many unexpected developments to the editorial office. In the spring of 1852 the strain of Willis's sensational lawsuit against Edwin Forrest, the actor, added to his previous ill health, caused the editor to leave his office to recuperate. Although he never returned to his desk, he was not willing to lay down his pen, or his responsibility as coeditor of the Home Journal. Every issue carried correspondence by himat first, travel letters, then the letters which were later issued as

19 New England Magazine, N.S., VII, 630.

II, 352.

24 Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 16. 25 New England Magazine, N.S., VII, 630.

²⁰ Henry A. Beers, Nathaniel Parker Willis (Boston and New York, 1885),

²¹ S. G. Goodrich, Recollections of a Lifetime (New York, 1856), II, 264. ²² J. C. Derby, Fifty Years among Authors, Books and Publishers (New York, 1884), pp. 230, 596.

23 Frank L. Mott, History of American Magazines (Cambridge, Mass., 1938),



NATHANIEL PARKER WILLIS



the books Outdoors at Idlewild and The Convalescent.26 Parton now had much more than a "scissors-and-paste" job; months would pass without editorial supervision. In the meantime the magazine continued its urbane commentary on the city and its people from

material easily gathered and easily put together.

Articles by "Kent" continued to appear. In one of these, the writer looked forward to the establishment of a newspaper which might be called the Times of America, modeled on the Times of London. Of America's three leading papers, Parton found the Tribune provincial in tone and filled with "isms" and party bias; the Herald spirited but catering to public prejudices; the Times purely a party paper. The best newspapers of the future, he thought, would be more independent and more commanding.27

A writer who had achieved great popularity was a woman signing herself "Fanny Fern," who had been contributing paragraphs to two Boston periodicals. It was common practice at that time for newspapers and small magazines to help themselves to each other's materials, and Parton, like many another editor, had frequently filled a column with observations by Fanny Fern. Though a collection of her pieces had appeared in book form under the title Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio,28 no one in the literary world had the slightest idea who Fanny Fern really was. There were many rumors, but there was not a single real clue.

One day, sorting the manuscripts and mail which came to his desk, Parton found a contribution extolling Fanny Fern. It was a long poem which could not be used, but the young editor forwarded it to her and impulsively scrawled on its margin: "Dear Unknown-New York is the place for you. You will find subjects here starting up in your path wherever you go. Come! Come! Come!"29

A few months later Oliver Dyer, publisher of the New York Musical World and Times, came to Parton with the information that Fanny Fern was in town and offered to reveal her identity.30 Fanny Fern, it developed, was Sara Payson Willis Eldredge, sister of N. P. Willis. The revelation was astonishing, for no

²⁶ Beers, op. cit., pp. 322-330.

²⁷ Home Journal, Oct. 9, 1852.

²⁸ Fanny Fern, Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio (Auburn, N. Y., 1853).

²⁹ James Parton (ed.), Fanny Fern: A Memorial Volume (New York, 1874),

p. 54.
30 Ibid.

word suggesting Fanny Fern's relationship to the editor had come to the office. In fact, Dyer himself, though his magazine was edited by another brother of Mrs. Eldredge, Richard Storrs Willis, had had to go to Boston to learn her identity.³¹

VII

Sara Payson Willis was the daughter of Nathaniel Willis, editor of the Religious Recorder and, afterwards, founder of the Youth's Companion. The Willis household in Portland, Maine, and later in Boston, was one of dignified poverty; yet the intellectual atmosphere in which the children grew up was the best New England offered, and each achieved success in later years. Sara was educated at Miss Catherine Beecher's Seminary in Hartford,32 and her lively mind made rich use of all the Seminary had to offer. At twenty-three she married Charles Eldredge, cashier of a Boston bank. The twelve years they spent together were happy ones, but in 1846 Charles died, leaving the grief-stricken Sara with two children, Eleanor (called Ellen) and Grace. The estate was inadequate for a family of three.33 The Eldredges wished to adopt one of the little girls, but Sara was not willing. She sought employment without success. In 1849 she married S. P. Farrington, a merchant of Boston and a widower with two daughters,34 a step she would not have taken except for her necessitous situation and her father's urging.

The union was most unfortunate. Farrington misunderstood the high spirits of his talented wife, was jealous of any mention of her former husband, and complained of her social interests. The husband publicly announced the fact in an advertisement in the Boston Daily Bee. Though vivacious and often thoughtless, Sara had never overstepped the bounds of propriety. Farrington's newspaper

notice was painful and mortifying.

The Willis family came grudgingly to her aid, accompanying their help with caustic advice and criticism. The Eldredges again

31 Ibid., p. 53.

33 Fanny Fern: Memorial Volume, p. 49.

30 Boston Daily Bee, Feb. 25, 1851.

Ethel Parton, "Fanny Fern at the Hartford Female Seminary," New England Magazine, N.S., XXIV, no. 1 (March, 1901), 94-98.

³⁴ New England Genealogical and Antiquarian Register, III (April, 1849),

³⁵ Ellen W. Eldredge Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection). This letter explains the Farrington trouble. Ellen Parton, as child and woman, saw the effects of unkind rumors upon her mother.

urged that at least one of her daughters be given to them, and the mother, forced to accede, parted with Grace. Since her relatives neither encouraged her in her wish to be self-suporting nor contributed more than a pittance to her support, her feelings became increasingly bitter.

But Sara Willis refused to allow circumstances to defeat her. One day she dashed off a paragraph entitled "The Model Minister" and offered it to the editor of the *Mother's Assistant*. It was accepted, bringing the sum of fifty cents. The paragraph struck the public fancy and was copied throughout the country. She continued to bring her writings to the editor and soon held two weekly contracts for columns in the Boston *True Flag* and the *Olive Branch*, two Boston periodicals.³⁷ Her family remained resentful.

Sara continued to write for the two papers under the pseudonym of Fanny Fern, pen names being modest disguise for feminine writers of the period. Her work began to attract wider attention, and Oliver Dyer sought her out as a writer for his own papers. His offer prompted her editor to bid so well for her services that Dyer unselfishly advised her to remain in Boston. Shortly afterwards a publisher offered her a contract for a book of her collected writings. From that time, her financial status was assured.³⁸

VIII

When Parton met Fanny Fern, she was a charming woman eleven years his senior, not beautiful, but striking in appearance. Poised and energetic, she carried her head of auburn hair proudly. Fanny Fern brought to her first tour of New York a fresh point of view and keen powers of observation. It was pleasant for Parton to discover that this witty and delightful companion did find in the town "fertile subjects for her pen." 39

When the Willis family discovered the identity of Fanny Fern, it was stern in its disapproval. Able women in that day were wont to hide their talents from the public eye. Mrs. Sarah

graph was "The Model Minister" and first published in the Mother's Assistant has been written many times. James Parton includes it in his biographical sketch of his wife as well. But there would seem to be no truth to it. Florence Bannard Adams, who is currently doing research on Fanny Fern, discovered that the "Model Minister" was the sixteenth published article in the Olive Branch. It is the writer's conjecture that Fanny probably did not remember and told the story of her first article so often and so well that it assumed the mantle of reality.

³⁸ Derby, Fifty Years among Authors, p. 209.
³⁹ Fanny Fern: Memorial Volume, p. 55.

J. Hale and Mrs. Lydia Sigourney had, to be sure, long since won fame, but their writing was of a more serious type—unlike the spectacular way in which the name "Fanny Fern" had burst into the limelight. Old Nathaniel Willis and his sons considered that Sara had brought upon the family unpleasant notoriety.

Richard Storrs Willis was shocked when he heard of his sister's descent upon the city and objected to any recognition of her writings. N. P. Willis demanded that Parton include no further mention or contribution of Fanny Fern in his magazine. Parton protested against the mandate, for he had come to admire the woman as well as her writings. Willis flew into a tantrum at the questioning of his command. Dismayed at treatment he considered obviously unjust, Parton lost his temper, dressed down his editor, and left the office. 40

He was once again without a position.

⁴⁰ The traditional story of Parton's resignation is incorrect. This revision is based on a study of the files of the *Home Journal*, the Parton Family Papers, and family recollections. Most accounts, including that of Beers (*Nathaniel Parker Willis*) and of Greenslet (*Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich*), suggest that the quarrel arose over Fanny Fern's desire to have Willis publish a story by her and his refusal. The matter had to do with republishing and was between Parton and Willis. Dates are misleading. According to a letter from Parton to Horace Greeley (see chap. iii n. 13), the author shows the disagreement could not have happened later than the early part of 1854. It is most likely the dispute took place before that time.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LIFE OF HORACE GREELEY

AMONG THE ARTICLES appearing in the Home Journal, was one by Amos Bliss of East Poultney, Vermont, on the youth and apprenticeship of Horace Greeley. Published with a prefatory note by Editor Willis, it elicited much comment from readers of the Journal.¹ The story of Greeley's remarkable rise from printer's devil to editor and publisher had already become a theme for legend; the New York Tribune, which he founded in 1841, gained him national reputation. The dramatic element in his make-up gave his success story a typically American character, while his astute journalistic sense, combined with keen business acumen, made his paper one of the foremost in the country. The many stories, true and false, circulated about him made the few columns of personal reminiscence written by Greeley's first employer welcome reading.

Several months after the publication of the Bliss article, Parton was dining one evening at the famous Dietz restaurant in Barclay Street. Near him sat the Masons—Lowell, Jr., and Daniel Gregory, brother publishers and sons of the hymnologist—whom he knew through their friendship with the Willis family. The discussion turned to books, and Parton remarked what uncommonly good reading a life of Horace Greeley would make. Describing the furor caused by Bliss's story, the young journalist observed that "no doubt there are fifty other anecdotes and scenes of Horace Greeley's early life, quite as interesting as these, only

they never have been written out."2

The talk turned to other topics, but not long afterwards one of the Masons, hailing Parton on the street, suggested the young editor himself write a life of Greeley, to be published by the Mason Brothers. Parton at first ridiculed the idea but later promised to consider the matter. Having read Carlyle and Macaulay,³ he recognized the importance of biography, but he

² Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 18.

⁸ Among the books which Parton bought in Philadelphia, now in the library of his grandson, were works by Carlyle and Macaulay.

had not thought of himself as a practitioner in this field, however, since he knew that "to make a real and vivid biography would require an amount and minuteness of investigation which could never be repaid in money, nor done without money. . . . "4 It was also a common opinion that the life of a man should not be written in his lifetime. Such reasoning was illogical, Parton thought. "If the lives of politicians . . . may be written in their lifetime, with a view to subserve the interests of party, why may not the life of Horace Greeley, in the hope of subserving the interests of the country?"5

Although they had never met, Parton was a warm admirer of Greeley. He like the editor's "advocacy of the rights of workingmen, and the interest he manifested in their welfare and dignity," and considered him "as solicitous for the honor and prosperity of his mechanics, as when he worked with them side by side, and

sat down at the table with them day by day."6

In a preliminary agreement with the Masons, Parton agreed to write the biography if Greeley approved.7 Suitable financial arrangements were also made. By the terms of the contract Parton bound himself to spend all his time on this original work. and an advance not to exceed seven hundred and fifty dollars was arranged.8 Since it was possible at that time to live modestly in New York on five hundred dollars a year, the additional amount provided for travel and other necessary expenses.

Late one afternoon Parton called on Greeley, whom he found deep in concentration, standing at his desk in the dreary editorial office, scribbling furiously. The editor seemed to be unaware of his visitor and continued writing until he was addressed. When Parton asked for a bit of his leisure, Greeley bluntly replied that "leisure was a commodity with which he had no acquaintance, he had none for years, and expected to have no more." Thereupon Parton proceeded to outline the reason for his call. The editor had already been told of the scheme; no elaborate explanation

ton, quoted.

⁶ James Parton, Life of Horace Greeley (New York, 1855), preface. (Unless otherwise noted, all references hereinafter are to the 1855 edition.)

7 Ibid., pp. 18-19. Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 18.

⁴ North American Review, CIV (April, 1867), 600. Parton to C. E. Nor-

⁸ Preliminary contract, James Parton with Mason Brothers, March 3, 1854 (Parton Collection). The book was to be about 400 pages in length, the initial copyright to be held by Mason Brothers, and the author was to receive ten cents for each copy sold. After publication Mason Brothers were to retain one-half the royalties until the sum they received equaled the advance.

was needed. Greeley dispelled any doubts Parton may have felt when he agreed that "every person whose career was in some sense public, was a fair subject for public comment and criticism." He insisted, however, "that he could not furnish materials for, nor in any wise make himself a party to the undertaking" and that he had no time to assist in any fashion save perhaps occasionally on a Saturday night, when he held a reception at his house. Parton assured him that the only aid he wished was as complete a list as possible of the people who had known him as a child or as a youth. Greeley instantly complied and in ten minutes gave his caller a long catalogue of names. Parton was ready to begin work.

H

There were many people in New York who knew the background of Greeley's work on the *Tribune*, and some who were familiar with his personal life. Those who remembered him from birth lived elsewhere. All of these Parton listed carefully, planning an itinerary which led him through the scenes of Greeley's childhood and youth.

Leaving New York in May, Parton had scarcely arrived in Boston, his first stop, when he received a letter from Greeley strongly objecting to rumors that he was personally interested in the work. This was a matter, as Greeley had earlier pointed out, in which he would have no part. The letter must have been an unpleasant jolt to the author, who immediately replied:

TREMONT HOUSE, BOSTON May 15, 1854

MY DEAR MR. GREELEY:

Your letter of the 11th I have just read with astonishment and

regret.

I deny emphatically, that I have ever used language which could in the least justify the inference to which you refer. I am as solicitous for your honor as for my own, and I never could have stated what would have been disgraceful to us both. On the contrary, I have endeavored to leave the distinct impression that though you did not oppose my project yet you declined giving me any other assistance than a catalogue of names, dates, and places.

I pledge you my word of honor, that the proposed book shall in

⁹ Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 20.

¹⁰ Horace Greeley, Recollections of a Busy Life (New York, 1868), p. ix.

¹¹ Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 20.
12 Loc. cit.

terms of the most positive and unequivocal, clear you of all participation in its preparation. The first chapter shall state that I never spoke to you until years after the desire to write it had arisen in my mind and not till some days after the determination to do so had been formed. The last chapter (probably) will be a short account of the way in which I gathered my information.

I cannot account for the report which induced your letter. I have stated frequently from necessity, that you are willing your friends should tell me what they know of you. With regard to Willis, I have not seen him for several months, nor should I have spoken to him if I had.

I did desire and try to keep my project a secret. But I found it impossible to make people communicative without giving them a sufficient reason and I soon became weary of inventing fictitious ones. As

far as possible I have kept the secret and shall.

I hope you will lay aside your apprehensions. I know what your honor requires. I had foreseen and provided against the very difficulty to which you allude. I know who and what your enemies are, and I shall let them know that my book is a sincere and spontaneous tribute of regard from one who forebore even to make your acquaintance till he had resolved to pay that tribute.

I am in Boston for a few days, and shall go to New Hampshire next. Then to Vermont and Pennsylvania. I shall not leave till next Wednesday and if you could find a moment to reassure me that you are satisfied with my explanations and feel willing for me to go ahead, I

should be grateful to you for it.

Very truly yours,

Jas. Parton¹³

Greeley sent a kind reply. When it came, Parton continued his work with confidence, and later, as he had promised, wrote a preface relieving the editor of any responsibility for the publication. He made the point clear and emphatic: "Horace Greeley is wholly innocent of this book."

The New Hampshire region around Amherst, Greeley's birthplace, Parton considered rather melancholy. It was spring, yet the landscape was somber, the roads were quiet and deserted, the houses dull and dreary. Many relatives and friends of the editor were still living about Amherst, and their recollections of the past were vivid, but what interested him most was the sort of life the people were still leading. In one of his many letters to Greeley, he wrote his impressions:

14 Horace Greeley, p. vii.

¹³ Parton to Greeley (Greeley Collection, MS Division, New York Public Library).

I am not pleased with the Human life in these rural districts. The young women are not rosy and strong. The young men are in haste to be away. The Puritanic religion broods over and blasts all the souls, damning the believers and unbelievers. Here in Manchester, you see the young men lounging together, the girls together, but no happy virtuizing union of the two sexes. The Puritanic virtue seems nearly run out, and these lands will not be inherited by their descendants. The Germans and other strangers will dispossess them.¹⁵

Traveling next to East Poultney, Vermont, scene of Greeley's apprenticeship from 1826 to 1830, Parton found the village uninviting: "In that remote and sequestered spot it seems to have been forgotten, and left behind in the march of progress; and the people, giving up the hope and the endeavor to catch up, have settled down to the tranquil enjoyment of things as they are." The author again ran into difficulty, this time with Amos Bliss, whose article in the *Home Journal* had been so suggestive. Parton wrote Greeley:

I have just had the pleasure of being informed by Mr. Amos Bliss, that he thinks it by no means impossible that your humble servant is a scoundrel. This is unpleasant. He likewise lets me know that he has written to you on the subject. I am very sorry you should be again bothered about the matter, and was, indeed, so disgusted that I could hardly be civil to Amos. But doubtless, he meant well, and so, let him go.

It all arose from my asking whether you ever enlivened your youthful games of chance by stakes. He said, "No," as his endeavor is to make you out the primmest, dullest, little Moral Philosopher that ever went into church. I said, "You did," giving as my authority one of the people of the town, who told me, that the boys of the office used to put pennies and even three cents, sometimes, on games of draughts and cards. That set Amos to thinking, and hence, his dark suspicions.

The joke of it was, that I had pumped him quite dry, at the first interview. So, he shut the door after the horse was stolen.

Enclosed is a piece of the Hemlock, from which your industrious sisters used to make brooms at Westhaven.¹⁷

¹⁶ James Parton to Horace Greeley, May 23, 1854 (Greeley Collection, MS Division, New York Public Library). Enclosed in the letter was a picture of Greeley's old home. Parton commented: "It gives the House correctly, but conveys no idea of the *scene*. That, the artist must try and do."

Horace Greeley, p. 85.
 Parton to Greeley, May 29, 1854 (Greeley Collection, MS Division, New York Public Library).

The quest for data proved pleasant. The people Parton met were cordial and recalled eagerly and vividly their early memories of the famous editor. His last stop was in Erie County, Pennsylvania, where he visited the editor's father on his farm. Lake Erie seen from the high bluffs was magnificent, heaving and flashing in the sunlight, but the city on its shore he found dull and ordinary. The houses were huddled about a central section unconscious of the beauty lying at their very doors. The bluffs cried for homes to enjoy their prospects, but only the animal kingdom tenanted its banks. He was ready to return to New York.

Much research remained to be done. The *Tribune* period of Greeley's life required tedious digging in old issues. Gaining possession of a twelve-year file of that paper, for six weeks he laboriously searched its pages for biographical material.¹⁹ Parton now got in touch with the editor to check his findings. Greeley, never noted for graciousness, was exceedingly frank in answering Parton's questions.²⁰ He seldom recounted his own recollections, however, or divulged anything about his personal life. His forthright denials spoiled two or three particularly good legends which Parton had heard, though the stories put Greeley in the happiest of lights.²¹

H

Eleven months after Parton first stood beside the editor's desk at the *Tribune* office, his manuscript was ready for the printer. His accomplishment in those months had been prodigious. No American writer thus far had so assiduously dogged the heels of his subject. By the end of 1854 few who had known Greeley at any stage of his life had escaped an interview, and Parton had read almost every scrap of the editor's writings. The author closed his book with a characteristically mid-nineteenth-century touch:

Reader, if you like Horace Greeley, do as well in your place, as he has in his. If you like him not, do better. And, to end with a good word, often repeated, but not too often: "THE SPIRIT IN WHICH WE ACT IS THE HIGHEST MATTER."

The Home Journal, forgetting past misunderstandings, was the first to give extended notice to The Life of Horace Greeley. Announcing its coming publication, the reviewer stressed the vast

¹⁸ Horace Greeley, p. 116.

²⁰ Horace Greeley, pp. 432-433.

¹⁰ Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 20.

²¹ Ibid., p. vii.

²² Conclusion of 1855 edition only of the Life of Horace Greeley.

amount of labor which had gone into the preparation of the book. Parton's one-time connection with the Journal was not mentioned, and personal commendation was limited to the statement: "Mr. Parton is a writer of sterling talents, and the editor of the Tribune is most fortunate in having a biographer who has accomplished his work with so much good will and ability."23 Mason Brothers in their advance advertising of the book quoted their proofreader: "It is the most interesting biography I have ever read."24

The book appeared in the last week in December, 1854. Bound in a cover of brown cloth, stamped with the gilt imprint of a large rotary press, it sold for a dollar and twenty-five cents a copy. Greeley's own papers, the daily and weekly editions of the Tribune, devoted three columns to reviews,25 prefacing them with the disclaimer, "We may without impropriety announce the appearance of this volume, and state the point of view from which it was written, although our relations with the subject are of too intimate

a character to permit a regular review."

The portrait of Greeley which emerged from the printed page was vivid and honest. Parton made no effort at interpretation, but in reflection upon his subject-"A man is, in a degree, that which he loves to praise"26—we discover Parton's own admiration for the man. Parton considered Greeley's influence on American thought and character greater than that of any other man in the nation.27 He praised him for his honesty, his devotion to human welfare, and his independent thinking. Parton did not consider Greeley a born journalist. "He is too much in earnest to be a perfect editor. He has too many opinions and preferences. He is a BORN LEGISLATOR, a Deviser of Remedies, a Suggestor of Expedients, a Framer of Measures. The most successful editor is one whose great endeavor it is to tell the public all it wants to know and whose comments on passing events best express the feeling of the country in regard to them."28

Seven thousand copies of the biography were ordered the day before publication.29 New York reviewers greeted the book with

Home Journal, Nov. 25, 1854.
 See advertisement, New York Weekly Tribune, Saturday, Dec. 23, 1854,

p. 8.
²⁵ Identical reviews, New York Weekly Tribune, Dec. 23, 1854, and New York Tribune, Dec. 26, 1854.

²⁶ Horace Greeley, p. 256. 28 Ibid., p. 205.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 412. 29 Triumphs of Enterprise, p. 20.

almost unqualified praise. Readers bought it at an astonishing rate-28,000 copies were sold in the first six months. 30 By January, Mason Brothers could quote a hundred passages from as many reviews, hailing both the subject and the writer. That Greeley had found his Boswell was an oft-repeated observation. The laudatory portrait of Horace Greeley was so convincing and impressive that Arthur's Home Magazine suggested that "Could Diogenes meet him, he would blow out his candle and be satisfied."31

Experienced writers might have found much to prune in his work. Parton himself, in a revised edition which brought his account down to the day of Greeley's death, 32 omitted the first thirty-four pages of the original. More mature judgment would have forced a more critical approach, though the choice of a living subject was in itself a hindrance to objectivity. It was a journalist's book, and the literary style was uneven, but the thorough presentation gave the work enduring value.

Greeley was pleased with the book, and his wife and daughter thought it excellent.³³ In the years which followed, the editor

and his biographer continued a friendship so pleasantly begun. When Greeley wrote his "Recollections of a Lifetime" for Robert Bonner's New York Ledger in 1867, he paid tribute to Parton's account but promised not to duplicate any of it.34 However, Parton wrote with some amusement to Bonner, who was also his publisher, that the Ledger articles were nothing more than a "dull reproduction" of his own book.35

One English reviewer considered Parton's kindly picture of this once-awkward farm boy a caricature of a man they thought must have been "nature's last."36 However, the outstanding critical authority in America, the North American Review, was warm in its praise:

This book is singularly well written: and its mingling of private inci-

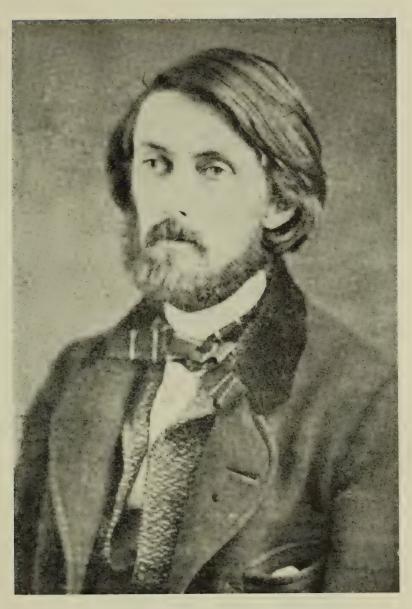
³⁰ Outline of Life for Scribner's, by James Parton (MS Division, New York Public Library). This figure should be compared with book sales of that period rather than with those of today's best-sellers.

³¹ See advertisement, New York Weekly Tribune, Saturday, Jan. 6, 1854. 32 Horace Greeley (Boston, 1872). See Appendix for bibliography of Parton's works noting other editions of this book.

³³ Ida Greeley to Parton, June 4, 1873 (Parton Collection).

³⁴ Recollections of a Busy Life, p. ix.
³⁵ Parton to J. T. Fields, Dec. 22, 1867 (Huntington Library Collections, MS Collection).

³⁶ Athenaeum, No. 1429 (March 17, 1855), pp. 316-318.



James Parton about 1855



dents with public history is so managed, that its popularity will not be transient.³⁷

The book sale netted its author two thousand dollars over the cost of production,³⁸ that is, beyond the expenses advanced previous to its publication. Although the financial reward was not large, it warranted Parton's determination to make a career of serious writing.

³⁷ North American Review, LXXX (April, 1855), 545-548. The reviewer, A. P. Peabody, three times wrote of Parton as "T. Parton." He was enthusiastic about the writer, subject, and the biography itself.

³⁸ Ibid., CIV (April, 1867), 581.

FANNY FERN

THE REPUTATION of Fanny Fern after her removal to New York continued to grow apace. Fern Leaves sold 80,000 copies in the first year of publication; its success extended to England, where more than one edition was published. Six months later Derby and Miller issued a children's book, Little Ferns for Fanny's Little Readers, the popularity of which almost matched that of its predecessors. Shortly afterward came Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio, Second Series. Sales were unprecedented.

TT

While Parton was preparing his Life of Horace Greeley, Fanny Fern was writing her first novel. Both books were published by the Mason Brothers, and announcements appeared in the columns of the same newspapers.³ The publication of Ruth Hall⁴ in the early part of December, 1854, attracted wide attention. Readers found it filled with the tearful tenderness Victorians loved so well. But the book shattered the privacy its author had sought.

Ruth Hall was filled with biographical material. The author had altered characters in a way she hoped would serve as a disguise, but the public recognized in the book the story of Sara Willis, noted the details of family misunderstanding, and took them all as truth. There were heroes as well as villains in the story. Chief among them was Mr. Walter, recognizable as Oliver Dyer, Fanny Fern's friend and adviser. Another was Hyacinth's (N. P. Willis) editorial assistant, Horace Gates, "a gentlemanly, slender, scholar-like-looking person" easily identified as James Parton. In the narrative, as in real life, the editor forbade in-

¹ See Robert P. Eckert, Jr., "Friendly, Fragrant, Fanny Ferns," *Colophon*, Part 18 (Sept., 1934). Mr. Eckert includes a catalogue of first editions of Fanny Fern.

² Advertisement of Fern Leaves, Second Series, New York Tribune, 1854, states that 93,000 copies of the First Series and the Little Leaves had been sold in the first year, while in England 52,000 copies had been sold.

³ New York Weekly Tribune, Nov. 4, 1854, p. 4.

^{&#}x27;Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall, A Domestic Tale of the Present Time (New York, 1855).

sertions of his sister's articles or of any mention of her, and it

was the subeditor who protested against this injustice.5

The book raised the curtain of anonymity behind which Fanny Fern had hidden. Journalists made much of the Willis family quarrel it revealed.⁶ Pained by the publicity but unable to avoid it, she was advised to imitate the silence of the Willis family and to ignore the gossip.⁷ This she did.⁸

Her popularity, however, increased by leaps and bounds. Julien, a contemporary musician, composed and published a "Ruth Hall Schottische" with a cover glorifying the author; a Pullman car bearing the name "Fanny Fern," encircled by a golden wreath

of fern leaves, 10 crossed the country.

III

Estranged from her irate family, loathing the curiosity of even a friendly public, Mrs. Eldredge was fortunate in the friendship of her publishers, the Mason Brothers, and of Oliver Dyer and James Parton. The latter proved a loyal confidant in trying days; the unkindness shown Fanny Fern appealed to every chivalrous instinct he possessed. The effects of this friendship became evident in Fanny Fern's work. Her material changed in content as Parton turned her attention to more serious aspects of the city's life. Most of her biographers have written of her dragging her widow's weeds across the pages, 11 but after a short time in New York a deeper note occasionally crept into her columns. From the beginning she had urged reasonable social attitudes, pleaded for happier lives for children, and offered concrete suggestions

⁵ Ruth Hall, pp. 302-308.

⁷ On the heels of this publicity, Fanny had to weather another storm. An anonymous writer wrote a scurrilous work not only baring personal history but also suggesting that Fanny was an ingrate to her family and an adventuress. See

The Life and Beauties of Fanny Fern (New York, 1855).

⁸ The one exception was a letter by Fanny Fern to the New Bedford Mercury republished in the New York Weekly Tribune, Feb. 17, 1855. Fanny Fern states the book is not authorized and describes her own life as "humble, no concern to others."

Advertisement, New York Weekly Tribune, March 24, 1855.

10 Clipping, New York Ledger, n.d. Published letter dated Aug. 9, 1873

(Parton Collection).

⁶ Boston True Flag, Jan. 13, 1855. See New York Atlas, Jan. 14, 1855, and also Feb. 18, 1855, quoting the Boston Saturday Evening Dispatch. The writer makes the interesting observation that "The greatest sin Fanny has committed consists in the fact she thought to remove her literary sphere of labor from the circumscribed limits of Boston to New York."

¹¹ See Ishbel Ross, Ladies of the Press (New York and London, 1936), p. 39; Colophon, loc. cit.

for child study which psychologists later approved.12 Repressed herself, she begged that other spirited children might be better understood. Parton talked to her of fundamental social problems; the seamy side of New York life, which Broadwavites evaded, Fanny Fern now challengingly called to their notice.

On June 9, 1855, Fanny Fern began to write for the New York Ledger. The Ledger was a story-weekly which was soon to attain the largest circulation of that time. Contributors such as Sylvanus Cobb, Edward Everett, Mrs. Lydia Sigourney, and Fanny Fern almost insured its success. For ten installments of a continued story Robert Bonner, the editor, paid Fanny Fern a thousand dollars. This was unprecedented remuneration, and Bonner proclaimed it far and wide. The acquisition of the popular authoress, coupled with Bonner's revolutionary kind of advertising, caused the Ledger's subscription list to jump within a year from 2,500 to 150,000.13

IV

The admiration Parton and Sara Willis Eldredge held for each other turned to affection and then to love. In their outlook upon life they were much alike-both were independent and determined, both were devoted to the cause of justice. Both had tempers difficult to control, though usually disciplined. Yet their mental processes were of completely different kinds: Parton loved to ferret out facts and to analyze their significance; Fanny Fern

was guided by her emotions.

On January 5, 1856, James Parton and Sara Payson Eldredge were married. The groom was thirty-four years old, the bride. forty-five. Earlier in the day they signed an agreement that all the wife's property and estate, both principal and income, should be enjoyed by her, either for her own benefit or for that of her two children.14 (In the course of the preceding two-year period, Mrs. Eldredge had earned well over fifteen thousand dollarsan amount that was handsome for any writer of the day, almost unheard of for one of her sex.) Following this formality, Parton and Mrs. Eldredge, accompanied by Oliver Dyer, took the ferry across the Hudson for Hoboken. The sun had already sunk be-

June, 1935), pp. 178-179.

Marriage Agreement, Sara Payson Eldredge and James Parton, Jan. 5, 1856 (Parton Collection).

¹² Colophon, loc. cit.; Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio, First and Second Series, passim.

13 Ralph Admari, "Bonner and the Ledger," American Book Collector (May-

hind the Jersey heights when the three arrived at the parsonage of the First Presbyterian Church, where the Reverend Mr. Isaac Stryker performed the marriage ceremony.¹⁵

In March Fanny Fern began writing a weekly column for Bonner's New York Ledger, an engagement which was to last, at twenty-five dollars a week, for sixteen years. Fanny's public found her weekly chat delectable. Theoretically, she loved privacy, but she could not refrain from putting herself, her emotions, and her family into her Fern Leaves. She enthusiastically described her third husband thus: Five feet, ten inches tall, modest, wears his hair long, has written more good anonymous articles than any other good man would suffer to go unclaimed, believes in Carlyle and can write a book better than he can tie a cravat—tho' since his recent marriage, I am pleased to observe a wonderful improvement. Her readers felt Fanny Fern to be one of them.

By July, four months after the wedding, the Partons had settled down in a house of their own on Oxford Street, Brooklyna house shaded by trees and far from the hurly-burly of New York. Mrs. Parton lost no time in describing for her readers her happiness over this event. She entitled her article "My Old Inkstand and I,"18 and depicted the said inkstand as sitting proudly on her desk, knowing itself to be the source of the earnings out of which the house had been bought.¹⁹ It was not long, however, before the Partons grew tired of living so far away from the excitements of Gotham. They loved the theater and the opera, the stimulating associations, friends, and pleasures they had left behind them. Spending an evening in neighboring Manhattan was quite an undertaking: transportation on either side of the Fulton Ferry was a tiresome problem, and on cold and rainy nights the distance seemed greater than the miles indicated. Brooklyn came in time to be, in Fanny's characteristically hyperbolic phrase, "the last drop in the water cup of human misery."20

¹⁵ Marriage Certificate, James Parton (New York) and Sara Payson Eldredge (Portland, Maine), Jan. 5, 1856 (Parton Collection).

¹⁸ Robert Bonner to James Parton, Aug. 4, 1866 (Parton Collection).
¹⁷ New York *Ledger*, March 29, 1856.

¹⁸ Ibid., July 19, 1856.

¹⁹ Mrs. E. Ferguson Greene to Mrs. E. W. E. Parton, Nov. 8, 1899 (Parton Collection).

²⁰ New York Ledger, Jan. 30, 1864, when the house was sold.

v

The early years of the Parton marriage were racked with trouble and despair. The age difference between the imperious Fanny and her husband did not mar their marriage as much as the differences in their experience and temperaments. Fanny Fern's personal struggles and the criticisms directed against her had made her neurotic and hypersensitive. Censure seemed always more barbed than it was intended to be. James Parton likewise was impetuous, and misunderstandings arose shortly after the two came to live together. In rapid succession the tempests broke, passed on, and returned again. No amount of intellectual respect could quell their temperamental incompatibilities during the early years of marriage.

Parton had a weak heart and a delicate digestive system, and these stormy disputes left him completely exhausted. Physically, he could not stand the consequent depletion of energy, and it worked havoc with his writing plans. The fact that both possessed the ability to put their feelings into telling and dangerous words heightened the tension between them.²² Only their underlying affection and very genuine respect for each other kept the marriage bonds intact.

In 1856 Parton's mother and the Pillow family moved to Rochester, New York. The family center now shifted to the home of Parton's aunt, Sarah Edwards, who, following the death of her husband, moved with her family to New York to quarters on Broadway, opposite Grace Church. The family occupied a basement apartment, and Mrs. Edwards stretched a meager income by renting the upper stories of the house.²³

The Edwardses were a talented family, and to their door came a delightful group of people. Among the frequenters were Mortimer Thomson, a special press reporter and widely known humorist writing under the pen name "Doesticks"; Thomas Butler Gunn, free-lance writer and cartoonist; Jesse Haney, publisher of the *Comic Monthly*; and young Thomas Nast, then serving

²¹ Harriet Prescott Spofford, "James Parton," Writer, V (Nov., 1891), 231. The article, tactless at the time of its publication, gives a sympathetic picture of the author's friend and neighbor. It was untrue, however, that the disputes ever led to actual separation.

Ethel Parton to the writer, March 20, 1940.
Miss Kate Haney to the writer, July 2, 1939.

his apprenticeship as an illustrator.²⁴ Conversations were lively; books and drama, politics and painting were discussed with equal enthusiasm. Theatricals were regularly held, and picnic parties, for which Nast and Gunn did program illustrations, were memorable.²⁵ James Parton added to each occasion. Mrs. Edwards was a hostess who made the relatively humble room glow with hospitality as her nephew led in good talk. The late-comers who arrived after Parton had left would inquire with disappointment, "Oh, has Mr. Parton gone? What did he talk about tonight?"²⁶

Mrs. Parton absented herself from the festivities of the Edwards group. Sensitive to suspected criticism by her husband's relatives and antagonistic to them, she would not attend the intimate gatherings. Parton was loyal and devoted to those delightful and warm-hearted relatives and never long absented himself from their door. It was a peaceful haven, too, after stormy scenes at home.

In 1859 Parton and Fanny Fern with their household moved back to New York,²⁷ Fanny Fern having purchased a house on East Eighteenth Street where they were to live from that time on. It was a fashionable and distinguished neighborhood, and Parton and Fanny Fern were by no means its least famous inhabitants. The move was to prove a happy one. Misunderstandings lessened with the change of scene and with the advent of a grand-child to the columnist's household.

²⁴ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Thomas Nast: His Period and His Pictures* (New York, n.d.), p. 30. Several years later one Edwards daughter, Sara, married Thomas Nast; another, Martha, married Jesse Haney; while the clever "Doesticks" married Grace Eldredge, eldest daughter of Fanny Fern.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 30-33.

Letter from Miss Haney to the writer.

²⁷ Parton's letters of 1859 bear the address 152 East Eighteenth Street. The number was later changed to 303.

CHAPTER FIVE

FORETASTE OF SUCCESS

WITH THE SUCCESS of his *Greeley*, Parton realized that biographical writing, great as was the labor entailed, paid dividends. He turned to the untilled field of American history, finding it rich in material.

Yet it was evident that some time would have to be devoted to fugitive writing. Parton continued to write for the press, although this work tended to sap the energy needed for major projects. He also compiled an anthology entitled *The Humorous Poetry of the English Language*, from Chaucer to Saxe.¹ Every anthology provokes disagreement. Concerning this one Horace Greeley, inviting Parton to the Oyster Cellar of the Everett House, wrote:

Now I think you have too much Punch and too little O. W. Holmes. Saxe has done more humorous things than you give him a show for. But let me see you and the book together and I'll try to make you debtfully miserable for half an hour.²

In the preface to this volume, Parton mentioned that after completing the collection, he realized that no woman poet was included.³ The editor observed that despite their "lively wit" and "quick perception of the absurd," women had never written successful epigrammatic or satiric verse. The verse is grouped under various headings, and "for the convenience of those who live remote from biographical dictionaries," Parton presents in an appendix short sketches of the poets represented in the volume. In the case of unidentified authors, short accounts of the magazines (some of them obscure) from which the verses were taken are given.⁴

¹ James Parton (ed.), Humorous Poetry of the English Language from Chaucer to Saxe (New York, 1856).

² Horace Greeley to James Parton, New York, July 5, 1856 (Parton Collection).

³ Parton, Humorous Poetry, preface. Fanny Fern commented on this fact and this work in one of her New York Ledger columns.

⁴ Parton, op. cit., preface. Parton explains that he has deliberately excluded much good material which he might have taken from printed volumes to make room for some that had not previously been published in book form.



Fanny Fern about 1860



The volume was not reviewed by any important national magazine. Notices appeared in newspapers and lesser publications, but few gave it more than routine acknowledgment. It had, however, a steady sale, which resulted in thirteen editions.⁵

H

Although "Lives" of great men, and men hailed as great, had been published in America, most of them were written for campaign purposes, and few indeed were of first rank. Jared Sparks had discovered fresh sources of material, but his works were not literary models. Actually, apart from Washington Irving's biography of Washington and Henry S. Randall's of Jefferson, no notable work existed in this field. There was many an American of high achievement whose story was crying to be written.

Parton remembered playing marbles as a child before a door that carried on its dull brass knocker the name "Aaron Burr," the sight of which had brought cries of "Traitor" from passers-by. The boy's curiosity had never been satisfied by vague stories about the lonely man who lived behind that paneled door.6 Now Parton took stock of the scant knowledge of Aaron Burr and again proposed to break new ground. The most complete and authoritative account was a six-volume work by Matthew Livingston Davis; yet Davis's three thousand pages, which contained letters by Burr, full reports of his trial, his European diary, and other materials, left Burr, as a person, a "baffling enigma."7 There was room, Parton thought, for a live account of Burr himself-an interpretative biography telling not only of the man's misdeeds but also of his good deeds, which had been quickly forgotten. The whole man, Parton resolved, should be made to stand out against the background from which his actions sprang.

Taking a stiff-backed notebook such as he used to jot down rough ideas for his New York Ledger paragraphs, Parton listed descendants of the Burr-Edwards families and others who had known Burr in his lifetime. He also compiled a tentative bibliography of sources to consult and books to read.⁸ It was the ap-

The second year after publication, Mason Brothers issued the fifth edition. The same company issued the seventh edition in 1860 and 1863. Houghton Mifflin Company published the thirteenth edition in 1881 and 1884. See card catalogues of the Harvard University and New York Public libraries.

⁶ James Parton, The Life and Times of Aaron Burr (New York, 1858), preface. (Unless otherwise noted, further references are to the 1858 edition.)

⁸ Notebook (Parton Collection). A list of persons set down for an interview and the bibliography for his study are given in Appendix I.

proach which he was to follow in almost all his future biographical writings. Those who lived in New York or the environs, Parton would try to consult personally; to others he wrote, explaining his eagerness to obtain any information which might help him to know the true character of his subject. A letter to Grant Thorburn, the New York writer and merchant, inquiring about Burr is typical:

If you will write out your recollections of him very fully and minutely, I shall be glad to pay you any reasonable sum for your trouble—provided no copy of the document be furnished to anyone else.⁹

H

In his preface Parton gives three sources for his life of Aaron Burr. First, the voluminous literature of the period, especially memoirs and letters of public men who were Burr's contemporaries; second, newspapers of that day, for which the writer was greatly indebted to the New York Historical Society; and lastly, personal recollections of friends and connections of Burr. "So superior is spoken language," he wrote, "that a few hours' close conversation with people who were really intimate with Colonel Burr, threw just the needed light upon his character and conduct, which ransacked libraries had failed to shed. But for such conversations, I should never have understood the man nor his career."

Many men whom Parton talked with had been associated with Burr for twenty or thirty years. Burr had been an extraordinarily vivid person; his great charm had deeply impressed all who met him. For this reason he was remembered with almost startling clarity. It was not only a conversation or an anecdote which Parton obtained; at times the tilt of the head or a gesture accompanying some story or remark enabled the biographer to reconstruct a whole episode. Conflicting opinions existed to be sure. There were friends and there were enemies; relatives proud of the family connection, others embarrassed by it. Yet the facts taken as a whole pointed in the same direction and told a remarkably coherent story.¹⁰

Parton did not intend to weight the scales in favor of Burr.

*James Parton to Grant Thorburn, June 6, 1855 (MS Collection, Boston Public Library).

10 Aaron Burr, preface, p. vii.

All he wanted was to allow truth to sit in judgment on this man whom the average American regarded as a complete scoundrel. On finishing the work, he was aware that readers would find the portrait at variance with the popular tradition, his merits "too conspicuously displayed, his faults too lightly touched." To such critics he wrote, "It is the good in a man who goes astray, that ought most to alarm and warn his fellowmen. To suppress the good qualities and deeds of a Burr is only less immoral than to suppress the faults of a Washington . . . besides Aaron Burr has had hard measure at the hands of his countrymen. . . . Aaron Burr was no angel; he was no devil; he was a man and a filibuster."

IV

Aaron Burr, as sympathetically depicted by Parton, was a man brought to ruin by his own weakness of character. Parton pictured his subject full length, giving him all the background of events which made him stand forth as a genuine human being. "Almost a model biography," Shelton Mackenzie, Philadelphia author and critic, described it.¹² The book contained errors of judgment and minor errors of fact, which reviewers pounced upon. Charles Eliot Norton subsequently suggested that the attacks were rooted in the belief that "it was injurious to the cause of morals to show the good in the life of a wretched man." ¹³

In England Fraser's Magazine, in a long article on Aaron Burr based upon Parton's book, honored the work as "a biography of more than ordinary interest; contradictory enough in phenomena of good and evil—a romance in real life, or the story of an American Barry Lyndon." More subjective American critics objected both to the author's estimate of Burr and to the popular style of the narrative, but the painstaking research in the preparation of the book was generally recognized and praised.

The Atlantic Monthly¹⁵ devoted seventeen pages of its first volume to a review of the book. The style was ridiculed: to

¹¹ Ibid., p. x. ¹² S. I. Allibone, Critical Dictionary of English Literature, and British and American Authors (Philadelphia, 1900), II, 1519.

¹⁸ C. E. Norton, "Critical Notice of James Parton's Works," North American

Review, CIV (April, 1867), 601.

14 Fraser's Magazine, LVII (March, 1858), 363.

15 Atlantic Monthly, I (March, 1858), 596-614.

write of newspapers "ablaze with victories" or "bristling with bulletins," of letters written "in hot haste" and of proclamations "sent flying" was objected to as beyond the bounds of good taste. 16 The content of the book came off no better than the style; the reviewer noted:

Mr. Parton is an unskilled delineator of character, a poor story teller, and a worse advocate. His book, despite its spasmodic style, lacks vigor. It indicates a want of firmness and precision of thought. It leaves a mixed impression on the mind.

The Atlantic's anonymous critic also pointed to many minor mistakes. These errors, however, did not amount to basic misrepresentation. Rash statements, such as "Burr's worst fault was a reckless generosity in the use of money" and that "on the whole he was a better man than Hamilton," contrariwise, earned deserved criticism. Years afterwards those who objected to Parton's heretical views continued to harp upon these and other thoughtless judgments in the biography of Aaron Burr.

V

In 1911, twenty years after Parton's death, a new challenge to his accuracy was raised by Henry Cabot Lodge. Writing in the Outlook on "An American Myth," Lodge attempted to explode a dramatic courtroom incident supposed to have occurred at the murder trial of Levi Weeks, in which both Hamilton and Burr served as counsel for the defense. Lodge maintained that there was absolutely no authority for Parton's account, basing his charge on a shorthand transcript of the trial, in which no mention was made of any such dramatic incident.

In a later issue the *Outlook* published an answer to Lodge written by Ethel Parton, the author's adopted daughter and one-time assistant. The well-worn notebook of the biographer revealed Nelson Chase, husband of Madame Jumel's daughter, as the source for the episode in question.²⁰ The evidence introduced

¹⁷ Southern Literary Messenger, XXVI (April, 1858), 321-339; Historical Magazine, II (March, 1858), 95-96.

Henry Cabot Lodge, "An American Myth," Outlook, XCVIII (Aug. 26,

1911), 955-956.

19 Aaron Burr, p. 148.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 597, et passim.

Letter by Ethel Parton, "A Defense of James Parton," Outlook, XCI (Sept. 16, 1911), 139-140.

by Miss Parton disposed of Lodge's charge of "pure invention." Nelson Chase, however, did not attend the trial; he had merely heard Burr describe it. Since hearsay has little place in historical writing, and in default of better reference, Lodge's investigation must supplant the biographer's account.

Parton's Aaron Burr was a problem for American reviewers. It was the first important interpretative biography to come to their desks, and it concerned an American whose career had been wrapped in obscurity and beset by controversy. The author had faced his task honestly, both as interpreter and historian, and he had not given the reviewers an easy nut to crack.

Burr was a man who, as the *Atlantic* suggested, might have been more at home amid the intrigues of a European court than as an adventurer in republican America. His biographer had posed him correctly before a carefully limned background, surrounded by men whose ambitions were often no more honorable than his own. In the preface to the enlarged two-volume edition of 1864, Parton described the book as an "eventful and melancholy story of a man who was at once gifted and unwise, generous and unprincipled, amicable and deadly." Burr, he admitted, "lacked the most necessary thing—a conscience, enlightened and controlled."²¹

Questions dealing with Burr's innocence and guilt have been fought between the covers of many books. The "great conspirator" was a leading figure in partisan battles of his period, and since that time adherents of John Marshall, by whom Burr had been acquitted of treason charges, have been lined up against Jeffersonians on this issue, as on many others. Parton himself in his Life of Jefferson observed that the President would have been less than human had he not taken up cudgels in his own defense at the quasi-political trial of Burr in Richmond. With the aid of sources later uncovered, other writers—Henry Adams (for the prosecution) and Walter Flavius McCaleb (for the defense)—pursued the argument, their uncompromising certainties canceling each other. Present day students of the subject regard the earlier historians—Parton, Richard Hildreth, and James Schouler—as having been both fair and temperate.²²

²¹ Parton, Aaron Burr, 1876 ed., preface, pp. viii-ix.

²² Julius W. Pratt, "Aaron Burr and the Historians," New York History (Oct., 1945), passim.

The Life and Times of Aaron Burr stands as the first thorough and popular account of Burr, and it demolished many errors and half-truths clustering about the memory of that unhappy man. By 1863 the work had gone into its sixteenth edition. The author subsequently revised the biography, adding numerous appendices, containing additional materials and papers, which his publishers later issued in two volumes.²³

²³ The first two-volume edition was issued by Mason Brothers in 1864. Subsequent editions were further enlarged. Houghton Mifflin Company in 1885 published and advertised additions to the biography reprinted in that year. The last imprint of the biography was in 1892. The contract with Mason Brothers made June 25, 1864, provided a forty-cent royalty on each volume sold (contract in Parton Collection).

CHAPTER SIX

$ANDREW\ JACKSON$

JAMES PARTON was now determined to make the writing of biographies his lifework. Even before the biography of Burr was completed, Parton had given much thought to writing a biography of Andrew Jackson, the military leader and statesman, but the difficulties of tackling such a task were enormous. Old Hickory had been the center of the fiercest partisan feeling. Old associates and old political enemies still kept alive the bitter feuds which began in his administration. Moreover, the shadow of Jackson fell upon every political campaign. As the Civil War approached, no one could forget his intense nationalism and the sternness with which he had faced the South Carolina Nullificationists.

Parton was handicapped by lack of research facilities. There were no great depositories of books, pamphlets, or manuscript materials within easy reach. The few libraries and historical societies in the East which had gathered materials of great value did not have full catalogues of these, and Jackson's period was too recent to have attracted their interest historically. A large body of letters and other memorabilia, however, was zealously guarded by Jackson's friends throughout the country, each determined to keep what was his own. Though bound by mutual devotion to Old Hickory, these friends were often separated by personal jealousy; it would be necessary for Parton to break down these barriers if his work were to be thorough.

No general history covering the Jacksonian era had been written. Even memoirs and monographs belonging to the period had yet to appear. An almost incredible amount of study of the times as well as of the man was required for the work. The biographer got much valuable aid from individuals who had known Jackson personally; apart from this source, his main dependence was on booksellers. Historians of the day were forced to build their own collections at great expense, and booksellers were to a considerable extent the nation's librarians, often turning up invaluable material for their clients.

Early in 1857, while still busy with Aaron Burr, the biographer began to save money for a trip to New Orleans to collect material on the life of Jackson. He particularly wished to make a careful inspection of the famous battlefield, but before he could take this trip, he became involved in a curious controversy with Walt Whitman.

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Among the friends of James Parton and his wife, Fanny Fern, were many of those literary figures whose presence in New York gave that city promise of cultural leadership. One of those was

Walt Whitman, then at the height of his poetic power.

Parton knew Whitman fairly well; Fanny Fern reputedly knew him even better. Soon after beginning her column in the Ledger, she described him in a series entitled "Peeps from under a Parasol." When Leaves of Grass came out, its cover design bore a striking similarity to that of Fern Leaves. Fanny Fern was the first of her sex to praise Leaves of Grass in print. She admired him, and at the time he graciously said he liked her "better than any other woman."

The friendship between Walt Whitman and the Partons was not to endure. One day Whitman mentioned to Parton that he was in need of money. Parton had a reserve fund amounting to something between two hundred and two hundred and fifty dollars. He had been saving it as a nest egg for his New Orleans trip. With no immediate need for the sum, he volunteered to lend it to Whitman if absolutely sure of repayment. Receiving solemn and repeated assurances, he lent the poet over two hundred dollars. Whitman later wrote that he had made neither hint

2 Walt Whitman, New York Dissected (New York, 1936), p. 147. Also

New York Ledger, April 19, 1856.

'New York Dissected, p. 147. In the Ledger, May 10, 1856, Fanny Fern described the poems as "well baptised: fresh, hardy and grown for the masses."

⁵ Furness, op. cit.

¹ Notebooks of James Parton's research trip to the South do not include a visit to New Orleans. Julius Ward in the New England Magazine mentions his plan to go there, but it seems likely that in the end he did not go to that city. It is certain, however, that he obtained interviews with, and letters from, persons who had been Jackson's associates in New Orleans in 1812.

³ MS biography of Walt Whitman by Clifton Joseph Furness. Quoted by permission of Dr. Furness. See also Text Facsimile Society Publication of Leaves of Grass, introduction.

⁶ Copy of letter, Ethel Parton to W. S. Kennedy, Feb. 10, 1897 (Parton Collection). This is the Parton version of the dispute, and the statement is clear and temperate. For the reference to New Orleans, see New England Magazine, N. S., VII (Jan., 1893), 631.

nor request, but it is certain he got the money and signed a short-term note for it.7

The date of repayment passed, and Whitman had not redeemed his note. Parton became worried, for he was confronted by mounting expenses connected with the proposed Jackson biography. He turned over the case to his friend Oliver Dyer. In June, 1857, Dyer visited the Brooklyn lodgings of Whitman and after a courteous conversation agreed to take, as partial satisfaction of the debt, an oil painting estimated at a hundred and eighty dollars. He also accepted conditionally, in lieu of the balance, certain books—Jefferson's works and Carlyle's Life of Cromwell. Twenty-six dollars was still due on the claim.⁸ Parton's signature never appeared on any paper. Apparently the whole matter was dealt with out of court.⁹

The wretched business was not allowed to rest. Parton on his part felt that Whitman had acted dishonestly. He was forced to postpone the Jackson tour for two years. Whitman blamed Fanny Fern for the trouble and apparently forgave her husband, for he wrote a favorable review of the Life of Aaron Burr for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle.¹⁰

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While the southern trip was deferred, Parton made a basic study of Jackson's life from New York sources. In an effort to examine all that had been previously written about his subject, he spent months browsing in bookstores and libraries. A mountain

⁷ Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden (New York, 1914), III, 237. Walt Whitman to William O'Connor, Sept. 28, 1869. This is substantially the same as Miss Parton's version. Whitman wrote that Parton offered to lend him the money. The charge of nonpayment is answered by reproductions of receipts for goods taken and is signed by Oliver Dyer.

⁸ Traubel, op. cit., pp. 236-239. New York Dissected, p. 238.

Walt Whitman, I Sit and Look Out: Editorials from the Brooklyn Daily Times by Walt Whitman. Selected and edited by Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz (New York, 1932), p. 211. In later years when birthday celebrations were held in honor of Whitman, Parton was asked for eulogies or contributions. He contented himself with polite declinations. His niece, Ethel Parton, wondered why he did not send explanations, but her uncle shook his head. "The man is old and probably poor. I don't want to interfere with his getting cash or contributions at this late date. But he's a picturesque old scalaway—Good Grey Poet! Oh Lord!" Not until after Parton's death, when Harriet Prescott Spofford, an old friend and neighbor, told Colonel T. W. Higginson what had been related to her in confidence at Parton's fireside, did the story of the loan reach the public. Then the flames of dispute rose again, fanned by Whitman partisans who heaped calumny upon Fanny Fern. See Appendix IV for a more extended account of this dispute.

of material was uncovered, including great piles of campaign

pamphlets and papers.11

The ferreting out of important sources was greatly facilitated by William Gowans, "the king of the secondhand book trade." Parton finally acquired a remarkable collection covering all phases of his subject. In a bibliography printed in his Jackson he lists two hundred works, some good and some bad. The publication of the bibliography was a new departure for Parton, and the idea doubtless grew out of his research and reading. He was also impressed by the citation of references in H. B. Dawson's The Battles of the United States, for he wrote to Dawson as follows:

I have long thought that the best way to make the American people acquainted with the history of their country is to render accessible to them the sources of that history—the raw material as well as the woven narrative. Your plan carries out this idea. The map of documents which you print entire and the numberless references by which you support your statement will make your work as permanently valuable as it is interesting.¹³

Parton's first reading of this mass of material failed to give him a clear picture of the man who was to be his subject. For every word of praise there was a word of censure. He learned that Jackson was a patriot and a traitor. "He was one of the greatest of generals, and wholly ignorant of the art of war. . . . The first of statesmen, he never devised, he never framed a measure. He was the most candid of men, and was capable of the profoundest dissimulation. A most law-defying, law-obeying citizen. . . . A democratic autocrat. An urbane savage. An atrocious saint."

In the meantime he had drawn some recollections from Jackson's own associates. Among those to whom he had written was a Mrs. Van Cleve, the mother of Mortimer Thomson's first wife.

I am engaged in preparing to write a Life of Andrew Jackson and wish to render it, in all respects, complete and reliable, telling the whole

14 Jackson, I, vii.

¹¹ James Parton, Life of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1861), p. vi. These pamphlets Parton considered far less discreditable "than the aids to an enlightened use of the franchise employed elsewhere—beer bribes, ribbons, the honeyed talk of ladies, and such rougher arguments as unclean missives and broken heads." (Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references to this work refer to the 1861 edition.)

¹² Ibid., p. xxv.

¹³ James Parton to H. B. Dawson, Sept. 20, 1858 (MS Division, New York Public Library).

truth about that remarkable man. Mrs. Thomson informs me, that, at one time, you were intimately connected with the general and with his wife. I think she said you were even domiciled in his family for a short period, and that you had many pleasant and curious things to tell respecting the habits of Mrs. Jackson.

I am aware, my dear Madame, that I am asking you a very great favor, and one which may cost you considerable labor. I support myself in so doing by the reflection that what I ask is not for myself alone,

but for the public, for truth, for History.

If, in addition to recording your own recollections, you could give me the names of persons who possess valuable information respecting the general, it would increase the value of your communication. If also you have any pamphlets of that day containing anything important for me to know, I should be glad to borrow from you long enough to copy what may be necessary.

And still further—though I have not had the honor of knowing your husband, I take the liberty of requesting his friendly co-operation with you in this affair. Mrs. Thomson informs me that he served with or under Jackson in the army. He may have precious recollections

for my purpose.

I repeat—my book will contain no whitewash. I am resolved to paint the general as he was, with all his faults, foibles, errors, and sins—

but all told in charity.

If you should be inclined to comply with my requests—any or all of them—I beg you will take your own time. If I receive your communication by the first of June, it will be quite soon enough. Later than that would answer, if necessary.

Praying you to excuse my freedom, I subscribe myself,

Very respectfully yours,

JAMES PARTON

P. S. A certain Fanny Fern, whose pen I hear scratching near me at this moment, begs to be remembered to you. "Tell Mrs. Van Cleve," she says, "that I keep a motherly watch over her daughter—driving her out to walk, and choking her with bonnet strings." Next week Mortimer moves near our own house, when I suppose, we shall imitate the early Disciples, and have all things in common.

J. P.15

The next month a long letter came from Mrs. Van Cleve. Parton wrote to thank her:

Jackson, truly depicted, will be a new character to the American people. He has been puffed and glorified out of all knowledge—he has been

¹⁵ James Parton to Mrs. Van Cleve, April 20, 1858 (Parton Collection).

whitewashed so thick that both his good and bad qualities are obscured. I shall try hard to present him just as he was. 16

Through such correspondence Parton obtained rare sidelights on Jackson; yet he felt that only a trip through the South to the scenes of Jackson's life, with personal contacts which might be made, could give him a complete impression of the man and endow his portrait with vitality. With this resolution he cleared his desk in preparation for departure.

The new year of 1859 had scarcely begun when Parton set out on his journey. Through his two months' tour of visits to the boyhood homes of Greeley and through summers which he and Fanny Fern had spent in northern resorts, 17 he had come to know New England well, but at this time he had never been farther south than Philadelphia. Now at last he was to visit Washington and then to explore the dark and controversial land of slavery.18

On January 6 Parton arrived in Washington. The train that had brought him had also brought Stephen A. Douglas, and at the depot a great crowd was massed to meet the senator. Those were turbulent days in the nation's capital. President Buchanan's star was waning; Parton noted the "general worship of the Rising Sun," for he found everyone speaking of Douglas. Upon the Negroes he gazed with a new interest. He fancied he distinguished those who were free from those who were not: "There is a horrible something about them—the slaves—which seems to say, 'Yes, I am one, hit me if you will: I cannot hit back.' Their attitude and face says this, as they stand hat in hand."

The next day Parton strolled through the gardens and rooms of the White House. The Cabinet was just breaking up, and he had a look at the members. They were but a "half dozen plain elderly gentlemen. Those who rode, rode in a one-horse chaise

16 Idem to idem, May 23, 1858.

17 Mae Weintraub Zlotnick, "Fanny Fern" (master's thesis, Columbia Univer-

sity, 1937), passim.

The Parton Collection contains three brown-backed notebooks of James Parton's record of his travels and the conversations which he had on his Jackson trip. His impressions were usually put down in phrases of a suggestive nature, rather than in careful sentences or paragraphs. However, the conversations were recorded and later transferred almost verbatim, as he originally wrote them, into his biography. All accounts, descriptive or factual of his trip, unless otherwise noted, have been taken from these three ledgers. Quotations marked are in Parton's own words.

in shabby country doctor style." The White House, he thought, was a handsome but plain building. Jackson's statue in front was

disappointing, and he dismissed it with the word "ugly."

With a brown leather-bound notebook under his arm, Parton first called on Judge Montgomery Blair, the son of Francis Preston Blair, who had been Jackson's political adviser and the warmest of personal friends. The Judge, who had known him well from his boyhood, talked long and cordially. Others upon whom Parton called were equally co-operative and friendly. Washington proved a rich field for investigations on Jackson, who had been dead scarcely a dozen years. Sam Houston had lodgings at Willard's Hotel, where Parton was staying, and the biographer found him in his room "smoking an Indian pipe vigorously and spitting across the room into the fire." Houston was courteous, immediately putting his caller at ease. The first meeting proved full of useful reminiscences, for the General gave an account of his own doings, of the Dickinson duel, 19 and of Mrs. Jackson. Apparently, he remembered everything about his long-time friend.

"Jackson was a wonderful man—a wonderful man, sir," he said. "He was exceedingly fond of home, hated to leave—longed to return—a very domestic man." The interview gave Parton even more satisfaction than the long account he inscribed in his notebook

indicated.

Each day brought clearer light on his subject. At night Parton would return to his hotel to inscribe in his large ruled ledger all he had heard from the lips of his subject's old friends and allies. The second day he again called on Judge Blair. That afternoon he rode seven miles to Silver Spring, Maryland, to see Francis P. Blair to talk about the man who was of such great interest to them both. The conversation lasted four hours, and when it was over Parton realized that his host had been as "clay in the hands of the potter, Jackson." He met Henry R. Schoolcraft, Indian Commissioner under Jackson, and he talked once more with Houston. He called, too, on Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, whom he pictured as a tall man with a large forehead and grizzled hair which made him look somewhat like Andrew Jackson. Taney refused to give any help, remarking that he was both too old and too busy to furnish any assistance. Parton observed in his notes that the Justice himself had "once considered doing a life of Jackson, but he had to stop because of want of time."

¹⁰ This duel, in 1806, between Charles Dickinson and Jackson, in which the latter killed his adversary, gave cry to "Murder." The cold-blooded incident on the Tennessee frontier hounded Jackson all his life.

On his last day in Washington, Parton set out once more for Silver Spring to see Blair. They met halfway, Blair being headed for the capital, and together they went to Willard's for further talk. Blair interested himself in the biographer largely out of his own concern with Parton's subject. He lent some papers to Parton, letting it be assumed that they were all he had. In reality, however, he withheld the bulk of his collection. He had already determined on George Bancroft as the official biographer of Jackson and could not be swerved from that choice. Nonetheless, in conversation as in the letters which he subsequently wrote Parton, he was courteous. After the first volume of Parton's work was published, Blair urged Major William B. Lewis, Jackson's old party manager, to send to the biographer, for use in the remaining volumes, the results of some research that Montgomery Blair intended to make in War Department archives.

In connection with this request, he wrote to Lewis:

Parton will make an interesting work of what he has in hand. I talked with him at large about it and gave him what lights I could to enable him to see the true features of the character it is his subject to display. I told him, if he would submit his manuscript to me, that I would make any suggestions to him which the reading of it prompted in my mind. He seemed to prefer that I should write a chapter of reminiscences for his work which should be given my name. He has urged me in several letters to undertake this task and fixed a date for the delivery of my MSS. I am, however, so dilatory in commencing a labor to which I make my best resolves to devote myself and I have hesitated so long to commit myself to Mr. Parton's design, that he must construe my silence into a declination. And now, indeed, I feel my first purpose full upon me, which is to do the best I can to have the General's renown to shine in Bancroft's pages.²⁰

v

After a busy week in Washington, Parton continued his journey southward. Stopping in Raleigh, North Carolina, he saw S. H. Walkup, who the year before had published evidence in support of his contention that Jackson was born in North, not South, Carolina. The next place visited was Salisbury, which he described as lacking the neatness of towns of the same size in the North. The streets were regularly laid out and pleasantly shaded with trees, but the wooden houses bore an "air of dilapidation,"

²⁰ F. P. Blair to William B. Lewis, Oct. 25, 1859 (Ford MS Collection, New York Public Library). Also quoted in John Spencer Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (Washington, 1926-1933), I, xxi.

and even the public wells in the streets were woefully neglected. Here he saw the old office of Judge Spruce McCay, a "little square edifice of shingles" which looked like a "hen house," where Jackson had studied law, the old tavern, and residents who loved to talk about the famous man who had once been a student in their town. In Charlotte, Parton met people who had known Jackson personally, and he soon filled many pages of his notebook with incidents, facts, and anecdotes. He liked Charlotte, a bright pleasant town with "a touch of gentility." Here he noted: "Large cotton wagons in the street. Wood cutting in the streets. Good tavern. A nice open rural village."

Parton went into the North Carolina back country to track down the earliest scenes of his hero's life. Burrowing beneath a clump of grapevines in an overgrown section of the Cureton plantation, he uncovered a heap of fire-blackened stones which had once been the chimney of the George McKemey log house where Parton thought Jackson was born. It was a thrilling moment. "Sacred spot! Not so much because there a hero was born, but because there a noble mother suffered, sorrowed and accepted her new lot and bravely bent herself to her more than doubled weight of care and toil."21 The land had not changed much in the years that had passed. People could still remember the stories of their parents, and here was talk of Andy, not of the General or President.²² One aged slave, still living on the Thomas Crawford plantation, claimed to remember the arrival of the widow and her baby. Parton saw this old Negress, Aunt Phyllis, bent nearly double with age, and talked with her as she pottered about her cabin, "tending the fire and keeping an eye on half a dozen small images of God cut in ebony, while their parents were abroad in the fields."23

Parton's historic sense was greatly stimulated by his week of travel in the western regions of the state. He wrote: "Going south is going into the past. Old manners. Old stock. Wild turkey and a few deer still shot." The four-or-five-day trip which the farmers took to the cotton markets was also interesting to him. The covered wagons, camping out in the woods, no robbers, no penitentiaries—all this proved the "dignity of agriculture." He might have written on much besides Andrew Jackson, but time did not permit.

²¹ Jackson, I, 57. ²² Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰¹a., p. 58. 23 Ibid., p. 59.

On January 30 Parton arrived in Nashville, Tennessee. Tennessee, he wrote, was the Pennsylvania of the South, "the best of Southern states to a Northern eye." Nashville itself was a "fine, vigorous, handsome place." In some respects it was like the usual Southern town with its "big square Court House in the middle" and its brick market. But he found differences. The unusually handsome houses with beautiful gardens gave the town an air of being long established, and he was reminded of New England. The streets were paved with bricks or granite blocks as in Philadelphia; the brick walls and mansions were also reminiscent of that city. The stores pleased this New Yorker, whose highest praise was given in the description "good enough for Broadway." Saturday was the great day in Nashville when everyone for twenty miles around came to town, when the square filled with "hay wagons, wood wagons, produce wagons, strings of mules, negroes, farmers . . . a bright, busy interesting scene." Comparisons with the North could go further, for lawyers were busy, farmers seemed prosperous, the schools were good, and rents were as high as in New York.

The area proved most fertile for Jacksoniana. Parton talked with many old associates of his subject. Among them none was more kind than Major William B. Lewis, who turned over letters and manuscripts and aided with helpful suggestions and his own full account of the President. The hours they spent together were rich ones for the biographer. Parton drove through the pleasing country to Jackson's famous home, "The Hermitage," but he found it in "scandalous unrepair." "Five dollars a year," he wrote in his notebook, "would have kept it in perfect order, a shame to Andrew Jackson, jun." The tomb likewise was broken down and in shabby condition.

Parton's week in the Nashville region was filled with extraordinary activity. It seemed to him "as if the city had formed itself into a Committee of the whole, for the purpose of overwhelming the stranger with papers, reminiscences and hospitality." His trip was soon to reach completion.²⁴ Contacts had been made, and he was assured of answers to letters he might write. On his return to New York, he immediately set about the task of assembling the material for his first volume.

²⁴ Parton's trip seems to have been concluded at Nashville. The possibility remains that there may have been further travel, either unrecorded or in some notebook since lost, for Parton, in his preface to Volume I, asserts that he visited "Alabama, the scene of his [Jackson's] early exploits; and other states, a third of the Union in all."

The scenes and happenings of Parton's Southern trip were sharply etched on his memory, the more so because they were laid in a region freshly discovered by him in a vivid contrast to the America he had previously known. Reading that he had already done was supplemented and to a considerable extent illuminated by stories and facts gleaned from Jackson's neighbors and colaborers. He made great strides in writing, and by early autumn the first volume was ready for the press. In October Parton signed an agreement with his publishers for a three-volume Life of Andrew Jackson, each volume to number over six hundred pages. He was to receive "thirty cents per volume on the edition sold in three volumes and ten per cent on the retail price of any edition of the book in different form." Two months later, in time for the Christmas and New Year's trade, the first volume was issued.

Work continued. Letters with additional material were received from Major Lewis, the Blairs, and others. One of Parton's final letters of inquiry was written to Martin Van Buren early in November:

I have brought the General to the time of his appearance upon the scene as a candidate for the presidency—to the time when you, sir, began to influence his fortunes.

I have thought it due to my subject and to you, to give you the opportunity of contributing to my work the information which you alone can give. I do this the more boldly because my book will demonstrate (not assert merely) that your connection with General Jackson and your conduct with regard to the succession was honorable and correct in every particular. Major William B. Lewis of Nashville, to whom my obligations are boundless, has placed it within my power to show this and to place it beyond question, forever. Mr. Blair, also, by verbal testimony of the most emphatic character, has assisted me greatly in arriving at the gratifying conclusion. I do not desire to penetrate forbidden mysteries, nor publish what obligation ought to be permitted to retain. A little general conversation with you on the policies of New York, and any pleasant reminiscences of the General that you might relate at your fireside are all I desire.

I can conceive of no good reasons that would render you unwilling to converse with me on the subjects involved. I beg to assure you that if you should think it best not to do so, I shall appreciate your motives and heartily coincide or rather acquiesce in your decision.²⁶

²⁵ Contract, James Parton with Mason Brothers, Oct. 18, 1859 (Parton Collection).

²⁶ James Parton to Martin Van Buren, Nov. 4, 1859 (Van Buren MS Collection, Library of Congress).

By prodigious concentration the remaining two volumes were finished in another year. The public now had what was to be justly regarded as the finest of Parton's works. Parton himself, in his preface, described the book as a portrait of "simple fidelity." By removing the whitewash which coated the old hero's reputation, he hoped to reveal "not a model to copy, but a specimen to study."²⁷

VII

The book was hailed by the daily press and the magazines as a remarkable performance. The Atlantic Monthly led in commendation:

The quality of sympathy with his subject, which led him in his former work on Aaron Burr to palliate the moral obliquity and overlook the baseness of his hero, in his consideration of brilliant gifts of intellect and person, gives vigor to his delineation of a character in most respects so different as that of Jackson.

The style, said the critic, was good, the task ably handled. The author's exaggeration of Jackson's merits and his outspoken attitude toward his hero's faults were described as Carlylian. Parton's introductory chapters of the first volume were reckoned as a "new kind of Geography and one suited to our Western Hemisphere, where men are valued more for what they themselves are than what their grandfathers were—for making than for wearing an illustrious name. In this the author has shown the characteristics of the Scotch-Irish people from whence Jackson had sprung and then how he strode out for himself." Nor was it alone his research, his felicitous style, or his portrayal of the man that appealed to the critics, but also "the light which he shed on the Political History which needed honest illumination. . . . Mr. Parton not only shows a decided talent for biography but his work is characterized by a thoroughness of research and honesty of purpose that make it, on the whole, the best life yet written of any one of our public men."28 The Atlantic was the leading American periodical; praise in its literary columns was praise indeed.

The biography also won recognition abroad. Edinburgh's Blackwood's Magazine found it "free from the common faults of biographies; it does not transmute the faults nor exaggerate in-

²⁷ Jackson, I, ix-xi.

²⁸ Atlantic Monthly, VII (March, 1861), 381-382.

ordinately the merits of the hero."29 The London Athenaeum considered the author a "painstaking, honest, and courageous historian ardent with patriotism but unprejudiced: a writer, in short, of whom the people of the United States have a right to be proud."30

Jackson's intimates were not entirely satisfied with Parton's book. Blair did not abandon his hope to have Bancroft do a definitive life. Failing this, he thought the work might still be done by his sons. He wrote Major Lewis and suggested that they both write comments regarding facts and opinions for their

use.31

Men directly concerned with some phase of history or the intimate affairs of an historic personage sometimes believe that no eyes but their own are capable of penetrating the truth. So it was to a degree with Blair and other Jacksonians. Parton held no particular brief for the man either as president or as politician. He stated his moral estimate clearly:

I must avow explicitly the belief, that notwithstanding the good done by General Jackson during his presidency, his elevation to power was a mistake on the part of the people of the United States. The good which he effected has not continued; while the evil which he began remains, has grown more formidable, has now attained such dimensions that the prevailing feeling of the country, with regard to the corruptions and inefficiency of the government is despair. . . . It must be admitted, that General Jackson, when his purpose was formed, when his feelings were aroused, was not capable of being convinced. His will tyrannized over him, over his friends, over Congress, over the country. No Dionysius of old was more autocratic than he. Unapproachable by an honest opponent, he could be generally wielded by any man who knew how to manage him, and was lavish enough of flattery.32

It was small wonder that Blair, who considered Andrew Jackson "the greatest man who ever lived,"33 disagreed with the portrait Parton presented.

29 Blackwood's Magazine, XCI (May, 1862), 1520.

³⁰ Athenaeum, No. 1683 (Jan. 28, 1860), 132-133. This same publication in the issue of Jan. 19, 1861, devotes its lead article to a review of the three volumes of Parton's work.

³¹ F. P. Blair to W. B. Lewis, May 26, 1863 (Ford MS Collection, New York Public Library). Also quoted in Bassett, Correspondence of Andrew Jack-

son, I, xx.

32 Jackson, III, 694-695. ⁸³ Parton's notebooks.

VIII

The popularity of Parton's book spelled doom for the fond schemes of Blair. The famous president was not to be redrawn by either Bancroft or by Blair's sons. Kendall, who had issued seven parts of a projected fifteen on the "Life of Jackson," had turned aside from his work, partly because Jackson was displeased with the project and partly in order to pursue his growing interest in the telegraph. Not until 1862 when William Graham Sumner of Yale published his Life of Jackson was the background which helped to explain the famous statesman's actions adequately sketched by the trained hand of scholarship, and when all is said, Sumner's portrait of the man lacked the reality of Parton's. Even in the biography by John Spencer Bassett,34 the leading Jackson authority of a later day, there was an obvious failure to fuse literary skill and the fruits of scholarship into an account which would appeal strongly to the ordinary people to whom Jackson was devoted.

Trained historians later maintained that the backdrop which Parton hung behind his central figure was rather flimsy, that his perspective was poor, that his interpretation of historical happenings was sometimes hasty, and proper appreciation of the figure which Parton brightly spotlighted for his readers was lost. Mistakes of hurried reflection³⁵ and some errors of fact no admirer of the popular historian can ignore have been uncovered. The Parton biography remains, however, invaluable for its original research material and for its vivid portrayal of the man himself.

³⁴ John Spencer Bassett, The Life of Andrew Jackson (New York, 1911).
³⁵ In his preface Professor Bassett, referring to Parton's picture of a "great, blustering, ignorant, well-intentioned, and always amusing doer of most of the politically bad things of the day," recognizes the author's tendency to forgive faults of his subject with a smile. This attitude toward Burr, Butler, and Jackson was a grave weakness, as was Parton's subjective approach. Yet this personal interpretation made for living material. Marquis James in his definitive work on Jackson pays great tribute to Parton's genius as a biographer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONTRIBUTION TO A CAUSE

SSUED at any other time than the close of the year 1860, the completed three-volume Life of Andrew Jackson might have been a triumph for its author. The subject was popular, the style of writing easy, and the book full of pertinent anecdotes. More exciting news now crowded the columns of magazines and newspapers. Secession, followed by war, threw literary interests into the shade. Orders which had naturally been expected to come in from Southern readers were cut off. Northern book dealers likewise, in this first year of war, found themselves in the slough of uncertainty. While returns from the sale of the book were sufficient to pay for the labor expended upon it, real appreciation of the work was to come in later years.

H

James Parton, though politically inactive, was keenly interested in government itself, but his personal politics and his reactions to pressing problems of the day are difficult to plumb. In his younger days he had been an enthusiastic supporter of Henry Clay.² When the Compromise of 1850 was passed, his admiration of Clay³ was unabated, though he condemned Webster's Seventh of March Speech in its favor, believing with many others that it was inspired by a desire for the presidency and that it was a betrayal of principle. Though Parton conceded some value to the Fugitive Slave Act on the ground of humanity,⁴ he opposed it as part of the Compromise. His political tenets followed no party. On the one hand, he believed in the low-tariff aims of the Democrats; on the other, he strenuously objected to slavery and denounced the party which protected it. If he supported any party, it was that of the free-soil Republicans.

No journalist, certainly not one connected with papers of large circulation, could calmly view the events which followed Lincoln's

¹ New England Magazine, N.S., VII, 631-632.

² James Parton, Famous Americans of Recent Times (Boston, 1867), p. 105.

³ Ibid., p. 46. ⁴ See n. 16, chap. ii. See also Famous Americans of Recent Times, Daniel Webster, pp. 105-106; Henry Clay, pp. 46, 50.

election. To Parton, whose recent studies dealt with the threats of nullification and secession which Jackson had faced and who had so recently traveled through the South, the thought of civil war was peculiarly abhorrent. He was convinced, moreover, that democracy had little actuality below Mason and Dixon's line and that the people in that area were given no chance to decide whether or not they wished to secede from the Union.⁵

The indecisive attitude of Buchanan's administration toward secession continued into Lincoln's. Parton soon sensed the inevitability of war. "There had been, indeed, for thirty years a most diligent collection of combustible matter," he wrote. "Every oratorical demagogue had wildly tossed his bundle of painted sticks upon the heap, and such men as Calhoun had burrowed through the mass and inserted some solid looking timbers of false doctrine and the necessities of despotism had built a wall around it, so that the fire apparatus of outside civilization could not be brought to bear."

After the outbreak of hostilities the Partons became "fearfully excited about the war news." They had personal as well as patriotic reasons for concern. Grace Eldredge, the daughter of Fanny Fern, had married Mortimer Thomson ("Doesticks"), a lively and successful lecturer and the *Tribune's* dramatic critic, after the death of his first wife. The romance dated back to the happy evenings when Nast, Parton, Thomson, and the others formed a congenial group which met at the Edwardses'. On short notice Thomson had been sent by the *Tribune* to Arlington Heights as a war correspondent, and the family eagerly awaited news from the line of battle. Thomson's accounts were lively and full of the activities which every loyal Unionist assumed. His letters told of the myriad duties he assumed from that of reporter to his self-appointed task as chaplain.8

H

As the war progressed, no general became a greater target either for praise or for abuse than Benjamin F. Butler. He was prominent in nearly every controversy regarding the handling of the war, whether it concerned slavery, military tactics, or recruiting. From his occupation of Baltimore to his governorship of

⁵ Parton, Horace Greeley, 1893 ed., p. 463.

[&]quot;James Parton, General Butler in New Orleans (New York, 1864), p. 60.

Grace Eldredge Thomson to Mrs. Van Cleve, July 29, 1861 (Parton Collection).

⁸ James Parton to Mrs. Van Cleve, Sept. 20, 1861 (Parton Collection).

New Orleans, his activities made headlines and became subjects of debate.9

As a criminal lawyer in Lowell, Massachusetts, Butler early achieved a wide reputation for brilliant handling of cases. He was soon a political force and interested in the labor conditions of Massachusetts mill towns. He improved the lot of the working classes while serving in the State Legislature. As a member of the 1860 Democratic Convention, he was a leader in the revolt against Douglas, and with Caleb Cushing he was largely instrumental in the nomination of Breckenridge and Long. His home state did not support his action. Running as the Breckenridge candidate for governor of Massachusetts in 1860, Butler received only 6,000 out of 170,000 votes cast.

When war began, Butler reversed his stand and became a brigadier-general of militia. Promotions were rapid, but with each step upward arguments over his conduct in posts he occupied became more intense. If his occupation of Baltimore was criticized, the circumstances of his command at Fortress Monroe and of his defeat at Big Bethel were even more severely condemned. Each assignment had been followed by a recall, and yet when the controversial incident was closed, the general was again assigned

to an even more responsible post.

The celebrated New Orleans campaign caused him to be damned alike by the Confederacy and Europe and made him a thorn in the side of the War Department. After the capture of New Orleans, he was appointed Military Governor of the Department of the Gulf and in that office acted with great severity. He had ordered the seizure of foreign moneys, issued the famous Order 28, which stated that all New Orleans women who were disrespectful to Union soldiers should be treated as streetwalkers, and ordered the hanging of a man named Mumford, who had hauled down the Union flag and hoisted the Stars and Bars over the New Orleans mint. These stern measures had made his name anathema to many of his contemporaries at home and abroad. The Government in Washington was greatly embarrassed by his conduct, and as order followed order, even the Northern papers found it difficult to defend the General. Finally in December, 1862, pressure from Washington caused his removal from New Orleans. Before he left, however, Butler felt impelled to deliver a farewell address

^o A very creditable estimate of B. F. Butler is that found in the Dictionary of American Biography, II, 357-359.

in which he explained the reasons for his severity, answering his critics with a dignity which to a degree checked criticism.

IV

Ever the champion of the misunderstood, Parton determined to investigate the merits of the General's case. On reading Butler's farewell address, Parton wrote, "he was drawn irresistibly to the conclusion that he must discontinue that fascinating employment for a time [Franklin research] and endeavor to inform his fellow citizens how it had come to pass, that a 'hunker' Democrat [New York conservative Democrats of Jackson's time], the Breckenridge candidate for the governorship of Massachusetts, a voter for Jefferson Davis in the Charleston convention, had become capable in the course of two years of writing General Butler's farewell address to the people of New Orleans."

Within the month James Parton dispatched a letter to the

General, declaring his intention:

January 19, 1863

SIR:

I wish to write the history of your administration in New Orleans. This I would do for the vindication of the country as well as to do honor to one who, in this most difficult of all wars, has shown a capacity equal to the occasion.

The work which I propose ought not to be done without your sanction and cannot well be done without your cooperation. I now

ask sanction and cooperation.

I shall require of you: 1st, one or two long conversations; 2nd, occasional short interviews or notes; 3rd, some instructions to your friends, here and in New Orleans; 4th, perhaps, copies of a few unpublished papers.

I propose a volume duodecimo, of four or five hundred pages, suitable for universal circulation, to be issued in about eight months from this time—sooner if possible. In about three weeks I shall be ready to

begin, and in three more to start for New Orleans.

I have no right to suppose that you have heard my name. Yet you may have done so. I have written a life of Aaron Burr, and one

of Andrew Jackson, besides some smaller things.

I beg that you will take this matter into consideration, and favor me with an answer within a week or two. Perhaps I should inform you in addition that I am a slavery-loathing democrat, and that you are my candidate for President.

With the highest respect JAS. PARTON¹¹

General Butler in New Orleans, p. 607.
 Jessic Ames Marshall (ed.), Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, during the Civil War (Norwood, Mass., 1917), II, 582.

General Butler replied immediately. The letter showed a dignified interest.

I am . . . much flattered by your request, and will endeavor to give you every assistance in the directions you mention. My letter and order books shall be at your disposal, as well as the official and unofficial correspondence directed to me. If I can by personal conversation elucidate many matters wherein otherwise history might be a perversion

of the truth, I will be at your service.

One thing I beg shall be understood between us, however, (as I have no doubt it would have been without this paragraph) that while I will furnish you with every possible facility to learn everything done by me in New Orleans and elsewhere, it will be upon the express condition that you shall report it precisely in that manner you may choose—without the slightest sense of obligation "aught to extenuate" because of the source from which you derive the materials of your work, and farther, that no sense of delicacy of position in relation to myself shall interfere with the closest investigation of every act alleged to have been done or permitted by me. I will only ask that upon all matter I may have the privilege of presenting to your mind the documentary and other evidence of the fact. I should be happy to confer with you personally at such time as may be convenient.¹²

Parton set about collecting all possible information about his new subject. After a month and a half he was ready to go to Lowell and wrote Butler:

... If you will be at home during the next ten or fifteen days, would it be convenient for you to give me a daily interview for an hour sometime toward the close of the day when you may be disposed to lounge on the sofa and talk? I would gladly go to Lowell and take up my abode near your residence. All I want from you is that which you alone can give—the rest I must get from your friends and comrades. But the more I get directly from yourself the better.

I have now collected nearly all the printed material and should like

to get to work in earnest. . . . 13

V

Parton's visit was made delightful by the gracious hospitality of the General and his wife. In his home, surrounded by all the amenities, Butler was a perfect host—thoughtful, informative, and eager to assist in every possible way. Mrs. Butler, who had been Sarah Hildreth, a former actress, was particularly charming. Butler showed consideration and respect for the writer's honest

¹² Ibid., pp. 582-583. Letter dated Jan. 21, 1863. ¹³ Ibid., III, 30-31. Letter dated March 12, 1863.

effort to probe the truth in his own fashion. In the preface to his book, Parton described those weeks:

We talked ten hours a day and lived immersed in the multitudinous papers and letters relating to the events which have excited so much controversy. The General placed at my disposal the whole of these papers and letters, besides giving the most valuable verbal elucidations and relating many anecdotes previously unrecorded. Respecting the manner in which the material should be used, he did not then, and has not since, made a single suggestion of any kind. He left me perfectly free in every respect.14

Parton was a prolific correspondent, and the letters sent between New York and Lowell were frequent. Butler answered long lists of questions by mail and continually forwarded copies of speeches and military orders which the author had not seen. These were enlightening to Parton, who confessed that Butler and Major Bell were almost the only Democrats of those recent times with whom he had conversed for more than five minutes. 15 Harpers wrote the General for the name of his biographer, offering to give the book a wide circulation as evidence of their approbation of his military course. 16 Parton, however, loyal to the Masons, told Butler that this firm had encouraged him from the first and were true supporters of the General's actions.¹⁷ Butler understood Parton's "standing by an old friend."18 When a Mr. Glenn appeared armed with a dozen letters of recommendation and suggested that he would like to do a life of Butler, the General made every effort to dissuade that gentleman from his endeavors. He went so far as to say he would buy Glenn off, if Parton so desired. 19 The biographer was appreciative but unperturbed. His work was well under way, and he said, "If Mr. Glenn has something interesting or valuable to tell the public, let him by all means fire away."20

By the first of September, 1863, the last chapters of the book were in the printer's hands. General Butler wrote Parton to say how glad he was that the work was being pushed to a successful

¹⁴ General Butler in New Orleans, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶ Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, III, 70-71.

10 Harper & Bros. to B. F. Butler, April 25, 1863 (Parton Collection).

¹⁷ Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, III, 71.
18 Butler to Parton, May 6, 1863 (Parton Collection).

¹⁰ Butler to Parton, May 12 and June 5, 1863 (Parton Collection).
²⁰ Parton to Butler, Sept. 5, 1863 (Parton Collection).

conclusion and added impulsively that he would like to see the "first form proofs." The request embarrassed Parton, but he replied forthwith, reminding Butler of his promise of no interference. The General, upon receiving his reply, answered immediately:

I am grieved I wrote so carelessly. I meant that you should send me a sheet or two of the letter-press proof out of idle curiosity, not to

make any corrections or alterations.

Your announcement then would be surely correct that I had never seen the matter in print. I do not desire that it should be otherwise. If I have aimed at anything in this business it has been to put before you all sources of knowledge and leave you entirely untrammelled to do what you would or could—and now when the whole is about crystalizing into form, I have no wish to dabble when I could do only harm.²²

VI

A curious item of Parton's correspondence was Butler's request to have Parton arrange a meeting with Greeley. Perhaps Butler hoped for Greeley's support if he were nominated as the Democratic candidate for the Presidency in the following year. The dissatisfaction Greeley showed with the Lincoln Administration in its management of the war made the editor a likely ally. Parton arranged the interview and sent Butler some helpful instructions:

September 27, 1863

My DEAR GENERAL:

I have just seen H. G. He will gladly see you any day except Friday, Saturday or Sunday, when he is either at his farm or at church.

He says the best way is for you to dine together. He is a restaurant man, with no establishment, and cannot therefore ask you to his house for that purpose. But he will meet you at Delmonico's, Maison Doree, or any hotel, whichever you may prefer. Please let me know the day.

I told him nothing of the object in view. And how you will manage to do it, I cannot conceive. The chastest virgin may have desires—may be tormented with desires, but she will not confess them even to herself. However, you know mankind, and will know how to shape your course.

If I might express, I should say: 1. Senator from New York. 2. Secretary of the Interior. 3. Governor from New York. Newspaper

²¹ Butler to Parton, Sept. 5, 1863 (Parton Collection). ²² Butler to Parton, Sept. 11, 1863 (Parton Collection).

advantages, always. To beat the World and Times, is naturally an

untiring purpose with the editor of another paper.

But H. G. is a naturally disinterested man. He is really generous, and would sacrifice himself for the cause. Still he is human, and has been most grossly treated by Seward.

I should think it better for you to have him alone. I mention this because he seemed to take it for granted that I should be of the party. The dinner should be rather good, for he likes a good dinner. So no

more at present from

Yours very truly

JAS. PARTON²³

Whether or not the meeting ever took place, we do not know.

Shortly after this episode an amusing tilt took place between the author and his subject. Parton had commissioned Thomas Nast, whose drawings in Harper's Weekly put him in the vanguard of illustrators and artists, to do a portrait of Butler for the book. He did so and pictured the officer sitting on a porch before a draped table with other officers and soldiers in the background. A copy was sent to the General, who immediately, if good humoredly, objected, protesting that he "never took much pride in public appearance, but such a cut-throat as that will keep people from buying the book."24 He suggested than an engraving of a bust by Brackett be substituted for it. Parton, however, demurred and praised Nast's portrait highly. Butler again protested: "Your letter convinces me I know nothing of my own countenance. . . . "25 The next day he renewed his offer, asserting he could have a thousand copies of the engraving delivered in four weeks. "Now pray be a good fellow and permit so much and the only interference with the book and you may say so if you can't stand it otherwise."26 Parton compromised by including both pictures of the General in the book.

\mathbf{v} II

On the eighteenth of November, Parton sent General Butler copies of the book with a friendly letter.²⁷

General Butler thanked Parton self-consciously:

²³ Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, III, 115.

<sup>115.

24</sup> Butler to Parton, Oct. 16, 1863 (Parton Collection).

25 Idem to idem, Oct. 19, 1863 (Parton Collection).

26 Idem to idem, Oct. 20, 1863 (Parton Collection).

²⁷ Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, III, 151-152.

The Butlers' feelings were colored by fear of its public reception. Mrs. Butler expressed her doubts to a friend, Mrs. Harriet Heard: "We have Parton's book. I fear it is a failure." Fortunately, Mrs. Butler was mistaken. Letters congratulating her husband soon ended the family's suspense. Tappan Wentworth noticed a tremendous improvement in the General's position and reported that the ladies found the book a good one—such as Parton always wrote. G. G. Hammond, General Superintendent of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company, wrote the General: "Mr. Parton has cleared away the fog and left you standing forth, a character to be admired and honored by every patriot who is for putting down this infernal rebellion in the only way possible." 1

Nor was it Butler alone who won praise. The author received his full share. The tributes were particularly gratifying since any book concerned in large part with military measures and official reports possesses handicaps for the general reader. The North American Review declared:

It is not only entertaining, but it is interesting. Mr. Parton's previous biographies have been among the most popular works of their kind and this new book will increase his reputation as a skillful biographer. . . . He has used his materials well, and his book is one of permanent value and historical importance.³²

²⁸ Butler to Parton, Dec. 7, 1863 (Parton Collection).

²⁰ Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, III,

<sup>164.

**</sup> Ibid., pp. 307-308.

**COULT (Jan. 1861) 261-

³² North American Review, XCVII (Jan., 1864), 261-262. Praise was not unanimous, of course. Parton hotly contested a review by the Springfield (Mass.) Republican as personal criticism of the author rather than just condemnation of the book (under date of Nov. 30, 1883; Parton Collection).

VIII

Parton's method of treating the more controversial phases of Butler's career is interesting. Throughout the book the author praised the decisiveness of Butler, contrasting it with the vacillating attitude of the national government. By adhering more strictly to the law and enforcing it more sternly, the government, he thought, might have prevented much disaster. Butler, he found,

... had imbibed a horror of all those loose, irresolute, chicken-hearted modes of proceeding, which have cost the country such incalculable suffering and blood. It is instinctive in such a man to know that, in this world, the kindest, as well as the wisest of all things, is the rigid observance of just law, the exact and prompt infliction of just penalty.³³

That, Parton explained, was why the General had found it necessary to hang Mumford, a reckless idler who had daily boasted of his treasonable act. While Mumford was waiting death, the General released from the same military sentence six Confederate soldiers who had broken parole. This commutation Butler granted without taking credit for kindness. Parton wrote:

The reprieve of the six had rendered the saving of Mumford impossible... It was, and is, the conviction of the best informed officers and Union citizens then in New Orleans, that upon the question of hanging or sparing Mumford depended the final suppression or the continued turbulence of the mob of the city. Mumford hanged, the mob was subdued. Mumford spared, the mob remained to be quelled by final grape and cannister. There was absolutely needed for the peaceful government of the city, a certainty that General Butler dared hang a rebel.³⁴

Whether or not General Butler had acted wisely the month before in his famous "Women Order" (Order 28) is questionable. His biographer gave a long account of the insults the Northern soldiers had to bear. Repeated offenses made both officers and men sensitive, and complaints became distressingly frequent. A dignified but effective punishment was hard to find. When a report of women spitting on his soldiers came to the General's desk, he felt that some measure was necessary before those under his command were provoked to retaliation. Thereupon he issued a decree that "when any female shall, by word, gesture, or

³³ General Butler in New Orleans, pp. 348-349.
34 Ibid., p. 351.
35 Ibid., p. 326.

movement, insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she will be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation." Secretary Seward, among others, attempted to excuse the harshness of the wording by suggesting that it had been composed in haste. Not at all, Butler told his biographer; "the problem was how to put an end to the insulting behavior of the women without being obliged to resort to arrests."

To make arrests for insults alone would have been to court resistance; the order as it read was calculated for effect. The General knew that there would be no outrage on the part of his troops, for they understood the reasons for the wording he had used, and as it turned out, the mere issuance of the order practically put a stop to the women's insults. The indignation against him, however, was widespread, and the term "Beast Butler" stuck. The sudden and frequent commands which issued from his quarters, accompanied by sweeping and ill-considered action, did little to bring about genuine peace in the conquered city.

In his anxiety to do justice to this man whom he considered greatly maligned, Parton sometimes failed to exercise his keen perception of affairs and high moral judgment. To the impartial historian it seems clear that both the General and his brother profited personally from the spoils of war, but Parton implicitly trusted Butler's own statements concerning certain dubious purchases of cotton and sugar.³⁷ Of the brother's profits, Parton remarked: "The General's brother was one of the lucky men who chanced to be in business at New Orleans at the critical moment." The biographer's explanations were too easy and too trustful.

General Butler in New Orleans remains one of the least admirable volumes that Parton wrote; yet the sale and the book reviews were gratifying. Mason Brothers issued the volume in a large library edition and again in what they termed a "People's Edition." In the first four months of publication, eleven thousand copies in the regular edition had been sold, and in all honesty, Parton could write the General that it was "the most successful book of the season." A German edition was printed in the spring of 1864, giving German-Americans a chance to read about the war

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 326-327. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

³⁸ Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, III, 448.

they so loyally supported. Publishers had indeed been right in seeking to place the projected work upon their lists.³⁹ For two years Parton gained a steady income from its sale.⁴⁰ The friendship between author and subject was to have important consequences in later years.

³⁰ In addition to the Harper bid, Ticknor and Fields had asked the privileges of publishing it (Ticknor and Fields to Butler, April 3, 1863, Parton Collection). James Redpath in January 1864, asked Parton for use of a part of the Butler book as an advertisement, in a dime series entitled Books for the Campfire (Parton Collection).

⁴⁰ Parton received twenty cents a copy (contract between James Parton and the Mason Brothers, Dec. 23, 1863, Parton Collection). The income placed

Parton in the front ranks of professional writers.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

JAMES PARTON had worked on Benjamin Franklin for two years before taking up the more timely subject of General Butler. Now he returned to his original project. Franklin's life was attractive in all its many aspects. Parton prized the monumental volumes of Franklin material edited by Jared Sparks, but the autobiography fascinated him from the first. This book, he believed, was probably the only one so far written in America destined to be known two centuries hence.

Parton was the first to attempt a complete life of Dr. Franklin. He wrote in his preface:

The publication of the Autobiography . . . has hitherto deterred every one from attempting a biography of Dr. Franklin. Several gentlemen have essayed to complete Franklin's own work, by continuing the narrative from 1757 to the end of his life. But the whole story of his career as it presents itself to the investigator of another, remains to this day untold; the one who would know it, in all its fullness and beauty—one who would see Franklin as others saw him, which is biography—must read ten volumes and consult two hundred.²

His ambition was to present Franklin simply as the great and wise person that he was. The work of Sparks had been completed in 1840, and little new material had become available since that time. What additional sources there were, studious inquiry revealed.³

Parton wrote to William Duane,4 a great-grandson of Poor

¹ James Parton, *The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1864), II, 639. (Unless otherwise noted this edition of Parton's *Benjamin Franklin* is referred to.)

² Ibid., pp. 6-7. In a letter to the writer, April 10, 1940, Carl Van Doren wrote: "I did do some analyzing of his apparent sources and concluded that they might be pretty well reduced to the number he said in his preface were necessary ('must read ten volumes and consult two hundred'). For lack of minute monographs in his day he had to depend on the major sources, and he did master them extraordinarily well."

³ The chief item thus obtained was an essay entitled *Liberty and Necessity* written by Franklin and issued by him in pamphlet form when he was a journey-man printer in London. Parton included this in the appendix of his biography.

'James Parton to William Duane, Oct. 28, 1863 (Pennsylvania Historical Society). Also, Duane to Parton, Nov. 2, 1863 (Parton Collection).

Richard, who had previously aided him in assembling data. Duane had edited letters⁵ written by Franklin to William Temple Franklin and Franklin Bache—letters now in the library of the American Philosophical Society. He knew, too, the names of Franklin descendants—a hundred and ten of them accounted for.⁶ Few of these descendants could add much to Duane's own collection of stories. Parton pumped dry all the wells of information he could find. A conversation with Mrs. William J. Duane,⁷ the old Doctor's grandchild, who had played on his knee and daily recited her lessons to him, was most gratifying.

Parton's work proceeded with amazing speed. Within six months of the publication of General Butler in New Orleans, literary critics found the two-volume Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin on their desks. The lives of Greeley and Burr were works of Parton's apprenticeship. The Andrew Jackson was a painstaking and monumental achievement, but its reception was slowed by the outbreak of war. Now the Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin, appearing at a more favorable moment, earned its author greater praise than any of the other biographies. In the North American Review Charles Eliot Norton declared that the work would add greatly to the already established reputation of the writer:

It is a book of larger scope, of wider interest and of greater importance than either of his previous productions. While displaying the same vivacity of mind, the same liberality of sentiment, the same ardor of feeling and freshness of style, and fertility of illustration as his former writings, it evinces deeper research, more confirmed principles, and a greater maturity of judgment and temperance of statement. It is the book of an author master of his own powers and confident of his own strength.⁸

Only the author's vivacious style, which Norton thought in bad taste, kept him from declaring the *Franklin* a first-rate achievement.

Other magazines were also impressed by the new biography. The Atlantic Monthly wrote:

He [Parton] is a good delver, a good sifter, and what is equally important, a good interpreter—not merely bringing facts to light but

⁵ William Duane, Letters of Benjamin Franklin from His Family and Friends, 1751-1790 (New York, 1859).

⁶ Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin, II, 628-631.
⁷ Ibid., II, 596.

⁸ North American Review, XCIX (July, 1864), 302.

compelling them to give out, like Correggio's pictures, a light of their own. He possesses, to an eminent degree, the power of forming for himself a conception of his subject as a whole, keeping it constantly before his mind in the elaboration of the parts, and thus bringing it vividly before the mind of the reader. Franklin's true place in history has never before been assigned to him upon such incontrovertible evidence.9

English journals also gave the work extended notices. In connection with its review of Parton's biography, the London Quarterly Review10 devoted many pages to an essay on Franklin. Though they considered this American hero overestimated by the author, they saluted Parton for "a very valuable contribution to our knowledge of Franklin's political career."

Warm praise came also in personal letters. Parton made new friends in the literary world. William J. Duane and his son were delighted with the account of their famous ancestor's life and the estimate of his significance. As a Philadelphian, the younger Duane wrote:

[I am] particularly pleased at the notice which you took in the book of the people in this city who have a hereditary dislike to Dr. Franklin. They are just as you depict them, the descendants of his political enemies of the Proprietary Party and the Tories of 1776. I have two or three whom your description suits exactly.11

Parton, too, had known such citizens of the Quaker City and could remember well their dampening of his youthful hopes. He could appreciate Duane's anger over the fact that a portrait of Franklin bequeathed to the Philadelphia Hospital had disappeared and that no serious investigation of the matter had been made.

R. Shelton Mackenzie, the Philadelphia critic, considered the Franklin a very good book indeed, though not, in his opinion, as good as the Aaron Burr. 12 The dowager of American letters, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, then old and with "weak eyes and weakened nerves," wrote a long appreciation:

I do not much care to read the lives of living contemporaries—I was perhaps the better prepared to relish your aromatic viands from having painfully crawled thro' the folio pages of Mr. Ticknor's Life

⁸ Atlantic Monthly, XIV (Sept., 1864), 383.

¹⁰ Reprinted in Littell's Living Age, LXXXIV (Feb., 1865), 289-305. ¹¹ William Duane to James Parton, July 2, 1864 (Parton Collection). 12 R. Shelton Mackenzie to Parton, Oct. 26, 1864 (Parton Collection).

of Prescott. Scholarly lives by feudal writers are not exactly adapted to these vitalized times. It is like looking over dried plants in the heat of the vigorous summer. 13

She had read it as avidly as she would a novel, for Parton's "conjuring hand had made it as fresh as the freshest romance

created by Scott's brain."14

The biographer replied cordially to this old lady of Woodbourne. Once again she took a pen in her quivering hand, making no apologies for illegibility. It was the day of Lee's surrender to Grant, and she observed, "Oh, that we had a Franklin to bring order out of chaos." Her chief praise was again for the biography itself:

Go on, Mr. Parton—use your time and health as you have done, for your country—Why in the world have not the Abolition sentiments and wisdom of Dr. Franklin been made more use of? Why have they not been quoted by every newspaper in the land—I have by the aid of a friend, been enabled to purchase some copies of your books for the hospital at Washington where my cousin has lived (starved) upon such as Harvey's Medica's etc. I would have every house in the land have a copy of Franklin.

You estimate—so justly—so happily in your concluding reflections—what infinite labor you [took] I am quite unable to express to you—my estimate of your works—They will bring you the returns of same, of more, and of happiness in the good they will do, the enjoyment they will confer—I trust it will not be long now before you will put out a smaller edition. I mean a duodecimo—and we shall have illustrations—fac-similes, etc. . . . ¹⁵

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote Parton at a later date about this biography, sandwiching her praise for it between a defense of Calvinism (she had been "solemnly amused" to the point of becoming "sore" at Parton's chapter on regeneration) and messages to Fanny Fern, whom, as Sara Willis, she had known at the Hartford Seminary.

I am just now in the midst of reading Dr. Franklin's Life, that nice philosophical old Pussy cat—may his shade pardon me—but I am a great lover of cats and think highly of them— and his way of making himself comfortable and everybody else comfortable—by sort of hum drum common sense, is quite adorable. 16

¹³ Catherine Sedgwick to Parton, Feb. 28, 1865 (Parton Collection).
¹⁴ Idem to idem, no recorded date (Parton Collection).

¹⁵ Idem to idem, April 9, 1865 (Parton Collection).

¹⁶ Harriet B. Stowe to Parton, n. d. (Parton Collection).

To Harriet Beecher Stowe, as to all readers, Franklin had become a real person. George W. Curtis expressed the universal sentiment when he wrote:

Every sincere American owes you great thanks for your masterly Life of Franklin, which I am sure will become precious in our literature.... I hope that you may live to go on writing, and I to go on reading what you write, for a great many years.17

This sudden recognition of Parton by fellow American writers is easily accounted for. Each of his previous biographies, good as these were, had as its subject a man whose character and historical significance were still matters of partisan controversy, but for Franklin there could be nothing but admiration. Of course the vears Parton had spent in practicing his craft aided in producing a well-balanced, maturely handled biography. The Life of Franklin gave pause to all who had stigmatized its author as merely a popular writer, and the new fame even brought about a keener appreciation of his previous works.

All later Franklin biographers have paid high tribute to this initial biography. They have found it "sturdily written"18 and of "an inexhaustible erudition,"19 the "best one" written with the sources then available.20 It has been the foundation for all subsequent lives of the celebrated man.21

¹⁷ G. W. Curtis to Parton, July 12, 1864 (Parton Collection).

18 Russell Phillips, Benjamin Franklin, First Civilized American (New York,

1926), p. 325.

Bernard Faÿ, Franklin, Apostle of Modern Times (New York, 1926),

preface.

²⁰ Carl Van Doren, Benjamin Franklin (New York, 1938), p. 787.

21 See citations in Bruce, Franklin, Self Revealed, and Bigelow, The Life of Benjamin Franklin written by himself, added to the above works, to note the satisfaction with Parton's biography.

CHAPTER NINE

BOSTON WREATHES THE MYRTLE

NDER THE GUIDANCE of the publishers, Ticknor and Fields, and the direction of the coeditors, Norton and Lowell, the North American Review had taken a new lease on life. In the decade preceding 1864, when it was purchased by the Boston house of Ticknor and Fields, the Review had fallen from its once high estate and had offered, to a rapidly thinning public, only the most pedestrian sort of essays and reviews. Norton and Lowell determined to find fresh approaches and new names with which to resuscitate the Review and restore it to a commanding position.¹

In line with this policy, Norton invited Parton to become a contributor. He suggested forty pages as the best length for an article and named three dollars a page as the usual rate.² (For an article of twenty-five pages, a hundred dollars, he wrote, might be paid.) After hesitating over the matter of remuneration, Parton capitulated and at once set about writing a series of biographical essays—essays which in their own fashion were to approximate the success achieved in larger works.

11

The vitality apparent in all Parton's writing came largely from the author's first-hand knowledge of his material. This life-giving quality was evident in his article on Stephen Girard. The friendship which had sprung up between the biographer and William Duane and his son in connection with the preparation for the Life of Franklin proved fruitful in this, his first essay for the North American Review. The elder Duane, whose memory covered a remarkable span of years, had a law practice that gave him a real part in Philadelphia's development. Largely responsible for the drafting of Girard's will, he was later a member of the Philadelphia Council entrusted with its execution. In that council Duane had been in the minority; his opinion was disregarded by the political leaders, who saw in the creation of Girard College

Mott, History of American Magazines, II, 246.

² C. E. Norton to Parton, Aug. 1864 (Parton Collection).

a magnificent political plum. Parton had talked with Duane about Girard's college and learned the inside maneuvers of its establishment. With extraordinary acumen, while engaged on Franklin research, he had taken notes on what the old advisor had told him concerning it. When the older Duane died, the facts for his essay were still alive. William Duane, Jr.,3 and Henry W. Carey,4 president of Girard College, furnished additional material. President Carey sent annual reports and obligingly wrote many pages of answers to the questions Parton asked.5 Duane sent him a book filled with annotations by his father. Urged to omit certain private observations on personal matters, Parton begged permission to use the facts as indicative of Girard's character, disagreeing with the younger Duane's attitude that "What's done, 'tis done!" After careful digestion of his materials, he wrote an account which he sent to Norton.7 It earned him the first of many checks from Ticknor and Fields and a secure place on the writing staff of the Review.8

An article on Voltaire followed. It was Parton's first effort on a subject to which he was later to devote all his leisure hours and which was to be the climax of his career as biographer. Norton, however, preferred native American topics and asked him "What do you say to Calhoun as a subject for one or more articles? His life, his doctrines, the growth and character of his

influence and his position in our history?"9

An essay on Charles Goodyear and his development of the vulcanization of rubber brought Parton back to American topics. Parton had visited Washington early in 1865, when the Goodyear family's fight for an extension of patent rights attracted considerable attention. The cries of "monopoly" and "lobby," used to defeat the request, disgusted Parton's sense of fairness. Admiration for Goodyear's pioneering activities caused him to write articles on the subject for the New York Ledger and the Times. A letter to Charles Goodyear, Jr., brought forth additional material, and Parton did his article on the development of the

H. W. Carey to Parton, Sept. 30, 1864 (Parton Collection).

Idem to idem, Oct. 10, 1864 (Parton Collection).

7 Idem to idem, Oct. 4, 1864 (Parton Collection).

³ William Duane to Parton, Sept. 28, 30, and Oct. 1, 1864 (Parton Collection).

William Duane to Parton, Oct. 1, 1864 (Parton Collection).

Ticknor and Fields to Parton, Jan. 6, 1865 (Parton Collection). For this article Parton received \$120.
C. E. Norton to Parton, April 12, 1865 (Parton Collection).

Charles Goodyear, Jr. to Parton, Feb. 9, 1865 (Parton Collection).

rubber industry and of the struggles the inventor faced before obstacles were finally overcome.¹¹

III

In accordance with Norton's suggestion, Parton wrote a sketch of John C. Calhoun; he also wrote an article on Webster and one on Clay. His estimate of Calhoun was caustic, for he considered that the Southern statesman's fame rested solely upon his espousal of the doctrine of nullification. Calhoun had opposed all those ideals for which the nation had so recently waged battle. Parton had little sympathy for him, and indeed an appraisal of the man by any other Northern writer of that time would have been equally unflattering. If a relentlessly glaring light was focused upon Calhoun, the treatment accorded him was no more harsh than that given Webster, for whom the writer felt nothing but a contemptuous pity. As a young man Parton had heard the orator speak and found him a sorry figure—even before the New England archangel had compromised his honor in the Seventh of March Speech. The critic knew that his estimate was severe, and he warned his editor. Norton, replied, "Let the whole truth be told."12 Parton therefore analyzed the man as he saw him. This article, praised at the time, has been sharply criticized by a later biographer of Webster.13

Parton was most sympathetic toward Henry Clay, whom he considered the most sincere, the most honest, and the most patriotic of the three statesmen. He believed that "a proper biography of Clay would be one of the most entertaining and instructive of works." "Why go to antiquity or to the Old World for subjects," he asked, "when a subject such as this remains?" These sketches enabled the biographer to set forth his own interpretations of morality, political necessities, and the contemporary world. He thought that each of his three subjects lacked some necessary civic virtue and argued that their faults should be set forth clearly, enabling others in public life to profit by their mistakes.

Suggestions for articles were frequently exchanged between editor and contributor. In one letter Norton commented, "I wish you would write an article on our newspaper press . . . as

¹² C. E. Norton to Parton, Nov. 22, 1865 (Parton Collection).
 ¹³ Claude N. Feuss, *Daniel Webster* (Boston, 1930), II, 371, describes Parton's accounts as "the most prejudiced estimate ever made of Webster."

¹¹ North American Review, CI (July, 1865), 65 et seq.

¹⁴ Parton, Famous Men of Recent Times, pp. 3-62.
¹⁵ Ibid., p. 52. Also, North American Review, CII (Jan., 1866), 147-194.

if you were writing for a foreign journal."16 Parton's answer was "The New York Herald," in which James Gordon Bennett and his paper were the pivotal subjects for a larger discussion of the press. Notwithstanding the many newspapers in the metropolis, there was not one, according to Parton, of really first-rate quality. The Herald's success, he believed, arose from Bennett's sure knowledge of what constituted news. Bennett, though the worst of editorialists, was the best of journalists, and the Herald, by catering to a news-hungry public, had thus outdistanced its competitors in circulation and built itself a marble edifice.17

When Parton's article was published, the Independent reviewed it scornfully, declaring that the Herald was the least worthy of New York papers and its magnificent establishment was a monument to job printery rather than the newspaper's success. In two columns the paper ridiculed every notion Parton had advanced and much he had not. It also questioned Parton's good faith as a journalist.18 The Independent's criticisms were based on a half reading of the article in question. The author pondered an answer to the charges. Robert Bonner, ever Parton's trusted advisor, hastened to send him advice: "Do not publish one word in reply to it. . . . N. B. It may be difficult for you to believe, but I believe that if it were worth while for you to pay money either way, you could better afford to pay fifty or a hundred dollars to have such an article published rather than pay

The articles generally won applause from all sides. James T. Fields, the book publisher, owner of the North American Review and editor of the Atlantic Monthly, wrote Parton a note of appreciation. The Masons, Parton's publishers from the beginning, were deserting that precarious field to enter the organ-building industry. Now Fields sought their distinguished author for his list. Parton replied:

Your note of March 11, which I received yesterday, gave me great pleasure, for I am so constituted as to need a little praise now and then. I not only take it, but it really seems to strengthen me.

C. E. Norton to Parton, Nov. 22, 1865 (Parton Collection).
 Parton, Famous Men of Recent Times, pp. 261-304. Also, North American Review, CII (April, 1866), 373-419.

18 Independent, XVIII (May 10, 1866), 4.

¹⁰ Robert Bonner to Parton, May 14, 1866 (Parton Collection).

With regard to the Atlantic Monthly, I will bear your invitation in mind and if ever a good idea occurs to me for an article, which I can use, I will endeavor to do so. The great difficulty with me is that I depend wholly upon industry—upon the preliminary research which takes a world of time. There are many subjects of the greatest possible interest which could only be properly treated after a long period of investigation out-of-doors. . . .

I should be glad to have you publish the pieces (biographical essays) to which you refer in a volume, when there are enough of them. . . .

The grand object of all is to show how things work in America, and who works them. I meditate on an article on Jefferson and Hamilton, to show the prodigious superiority of Jefferson and that the only safety is in following him, not his rival.²⁰

Soon afterwards arrangements were completed between the two publishers for a transfer of the type plates and contracts of Parton's previous works. Norton sent his congratulations and added "the men who can write as you do—articles alike for the great public and for the critical few—may be numbered on one hand. You are beginning to have your imitators; but what good are imitators? . . . "21"

The new relationship with Ticknor and Fields was further cemented by the printing of the biographical sketches in book form. This publication, Famous Men of Recent Times, won instantaneous praise. The Atlantic Monthly commented:

The *Nation*, just beginning its long and distinguished career in the magazine world, already was noted for its critical standards. Here was a subtle reflection of the New York view versus the earlier New England reaction to Parton's work.

The service which Mr. Parton has rendered us by supplying us with readable and interesting biographies of many of the most distin-

²¹ C. E. Norton to Parton, May 23, 1866 (Parton Collection).
²² Atlantic Monthly, XIX (May, 1867), 637.

²⁰ Parton to Fields, March 15, 1866 (Fields Collection, Huntington Memorial Library).

guished Americans has not been as yet fully recognized. The defects of his literary style and the unimaginative quality of his mind have offended our most fastidious critics and have to a certain extent prevented his receiving the credit which belongs to him for the essential merits of his books. . . . His best work is so good, and its defects are so obviously the result in large measure of haste in composition, that we cannot but regret to see him at present devoting himself to writing for the magazines. It is a pity that his talents should be employed in providing monthly entertainments.

The periodical went on to emphasize what it considered the three chief characteristics of Parton's work:

- 1. First among these qualities, he possesses the fundamental requisite of any biographer—the disposition and the ability to tell the truth about the men of whom he writes. . . .
- 2. A ruling moral idea may, we think, be traced running through all his biographies—the superiority of goodness to talents, of principle to will. . . .
- 3. Eminent readableness.23

Such criticism would have given wings to any writer's spirits. Parton write to Fields: "Glory keeps coming in. I had no sooner done blushing at the North American article, than I am suffering anew at the most telling and selling one in the Nation. Nothing remains now but for someone to start the report that the new book is indecent. Then it will sell like Swinburne."²⁴

V

In July Ticknor and Fields, his new publishers, urged Parton to contribute to the *Atlantic Monthly*, their chief periodical. They suggested a number of topics of current interest, among them "The Sewing Machine," "Hoop Skirts," and "Gutta Percha Ornaments"—twenty-one topics in all, from which Parton was to choose. "You know us as publishers," they wrote. "Come down and behold us as men and brothers." The resultant visit to Boston was the first of many trips betwen the two cities.

A contract with another periodical, however, concerned Robert Bonner, whose New York *Ledger* had, from the beginning, welcomed any contributions he might make. The author wrote him

²² Nation, IV (April 11, 1867), 290-291.

 ²⁴ Parton to Fields, April 14, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).
 ²⁵ Ticknor and Fields to Parton, July 9, 1866 (Parton Collection).

about the new arrangements. With characteristic generosity, Bonner replied:

I am glad of it for your sake—I like to have every one with whom I have any connection to do well: and to show you that I do not say I am glad of it because I want to get rid of you, I will pay you for any further articles you may write \$25 each, so that you and Fanny can have the same pay-you can write one every week, or if the acceptance of the Boston offer will prevent your doing that, you can write me one every two or three weeks. Suit yourself about that.28

His first contribution to the Atlantic was an article on "Henry Ward Beecher and His Church."27 Soon afterwards Parton left for a five weeks' tour of the Middle West, expenses paid, to gather material for a series of articles on the growing cities of that region. The trip was delightful, and on his return to East Eighteenth Street, he advised Fields, "When next you are tired, go to those western cities, and get below the surface of them. As man of business, as literary man, as American citizen, as human being, you will be instructed and pleased. The United States is there."28

Fields, addressing his letter "Dear Wanderer Returned," termed the Beecher paper "magnificent"29 and invited the writer to Boston for a dinner. Parton regretted. "There was never such a poor diner-out as I," he wrote. "I cannot sing a song, nor tell a story, nor make a speech, nor drink more than half a bottle of wine."30

The hard-working journalist immediately tackled the jobs on hand. There was first the Chicago article and then a long-delayed story of the sewing machine. The latter proved engrossing. Parton announced his fact findings, reporting that Elias Howe, then producing a thousand a day, received a dollar a day for each one retailed. "This is better," he suggested to Fields, "than writing

²⁷ Atlantic Monthly, XIX (Jan., 1867), 38-51.

²⁸ Parton to Fields, Dec. 12, 1866 (Huntington Memorial Library).

²⁶ Robert Bonner to Parton, Aug. 4, 1866 (Parton Collection).

²⁹ Fields to Parton, Dec. 15, 1866 (Parton Collection). The adjective must have pleased Parton, who had previously expressed doubts as to the probable reception of that article by the public: "The subject has its dangers, in avoiding which I scratched out almost as much as I have retained. To make sure, I read it over to Mrs. Parton, who is a judge of what all the religious people will stand. I hope we are right in thinking that it is now safe" (Parton to Fields, Oct. 26, 1866, Huntington Memorial Library).

so Parton to Fields, Jan. 29, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

articles, and better than publishing them. Let us invent something immediately."31

Ideas for new articles tumbled forth in rapid succession and as quickly were relayed to his editor.

I have sent the Sewing Machine. It is an important and interesting chapter in the history of the United States—that part of history which is so important that historians seldom say anything about it....

Good subjects: "W. H. Seward—What is the matter with him?" Horace Greeley knows. Would he tell? Something has been destroying him. It may be drink; it may be tobacco; it may be ambition; it

may be all three.

Good subject: "The Prince of Wales—Will he reign?" chance for a nice article about England, the dynasty, "John Bright, for President of England," and anything else that is interesting, including Queen Victoria and her mourning. Mr. Conway, who writes those good London letters to the Boston Commonwealth, could do it well.

Of course you have thought of Mr. Motley, late of Vienna. He could tell us delightful things, if he would, about Austria, diplomatic

life, etc. Excuse this boring.32

Eight articles a year for the Atlantic Monthly was a big assignment. Had Parton been allowed to choose his topics, the task might have been less grueling. Subjects such as the cities of the West, "International Copyright," and "The Sewing Machine" held the writer's interest, but it was only as hack work that he turned out "The Piano in the United States," "Among the Workers in Silver," and "The Clothes Mania." Parton was not the only one to balk at this odd assortment of topics. The Nation satirically predicted that it would not be long before some magazine, following the Atlantic's precedent, came out with articles on Hacker's Farina, Phelan's Billiard Tables, and Paper Collars.³³

Nothing seemed to quench Parton's enthusiasm. In November, 1867, Dickens arrived in the United States for his triumphal lecture tour. The Fieldses were his hosts in Boston. Parton sent new suggestions to be considered after the Dickens celebrations were over. The idea was one that had long been on his mind:

These truths are self-evident: 1. The most influential and important of all books are school readers. 2. Most of those now used are poor,

33 Nation, V (Dec. 5, 1867), 452-453.

Parton to Fields, Jan. 29, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).
 Parton to Fields, Feb. 13, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

crude, paltry trash. 3. Hence they sell like the devil. 4. But there are some intelligent teachers who would like good ones.

Suppose a set were prepared by (or with the assistance and sanction

of) such men as Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Bellows, Eliot.

The work would have to be done by one person but each of these eminent men would have to aid and approve. Say 4 Readers, every piece truly excellent in every respect. No hear-say and no superstition. No advocacy of any "issue." All fair, bright, beneficial; all "seed-corn" that ought not be ground. Such books as would permanently bless every child who should use them. No "notes" or "analysis" or "directions to the teacher." Books full of good reading, and nothing else. I have had this idea for 20 years.

Lately, having looked over some of the newest sets, and seeing what abominable crude stuff they are, I have got on so far as to mention it to you. "Pray over it."

J. P.

Or—Make them International, with Charles Dickens (and Mr. Longfellow)—for editors, Published by T. and F. on both sides of the Atlantic simultaneously.

Don't reject this hastily. Let Mr. Osgood try his giant mind on it. Let Mr. Clark take it home with him. Let Mr. Ticknor sleep on it.³⁴

But textbooks were frankly commercial projects, and the firm glossed over that aspect of its business. The scheme of the onetime teacher apparently failed to appeal to Ticknor and Fields.

VII

Whatever the subject, important or trivial, Parton had a knack for injecting interest and life into it. Whitelaw Reid, editor of the New York *Tribune*, interviewed on the art of reporting, cited him as an outstanding journalist. "Somebody once called James Parton 'an inspired reporter,'" he said. "It was a compliment to Parton, and a deserved recognition of what the business of reporting in its highest branches may be. All Parton's wonderful power of story telling, of entrancing the reader's mind, of seizing and making lucid the essential facts of a case, exhibits the precise sort of capacity that reporters have a chance to display." 35

Parton's vivid accounts of the Western cities—Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh—were the work of a journalist. He marveled at the rapid growth of Chicago, in 1867 a city of over

³⁴ Parton to Fields, Dec. 3, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library). ³⁵ Charles F. Wingate (ed.), Views and Interviews on Journalism (New York, 1875), p. 33.



HARRIET BEECHER STOWE AND HENRY WARD BEECHER



260,000 inhabitants, crowded with buildings of light-colored stone and brick, lining the bustling boulevards. The suburbs of workers' houses looked like garden additions, while the citizens were wide

awake and progressive.36

After the hurly-burly of Chicago, Parton discovered in St. Louis a city of another world. He was quite carried away with it; he reported that it had "stolen into greatness" and in a letter to Fields, suggested it was "destined to be the capital of the United States and Civilization." Cincinnati, where he stopped on his way east, revealed little that called for special comment. Pittsburgh, on the other hand, made a ready topic for a pen seeking dramatic contrasts. Prepared to find this city covered with a pall of soot from the iron furnaces which furnished its industrial lifeblood, he was astonished to find the people so unperturbed by the perpetual grime.

VIII

James Parton was a pioneer "muckraker" and a constructive one. Following his first contributions to the *Atlantic*, he wrote a series of articles criticizing the needless waste in the organization and functioning of the national government. The series consisted of five papers—"The 'Strikers' of the Washington Lobby," "Log Rolling at Washington," "The Small Sins of Congress," "Uncle Sam's Treatment of His Servants," and "The Pressure upon Congress." The Washington of the late sixties presented an accumulation of evils begun in Jackson's day, heightened by postwar opportunities for plunder. Nevertheless, he was confident that there was destined to be a steady rise in the level of civic virtue. Anxious to forestall any foreign criticism of the country's government, he cited similar evils in European parliaments and the ignorance of the emigrants from their lands and observed:

³⁶ Atlantic Monthly, XIX (March, 1867), 325-345.

³⁷ Ibid., XIX (June, 1867), 655-674.

³⁸ Parton to Fields, Nov. 24, 1866 (Huntington Memorial Library).
⁸⁹ Atlantic Monthly, XX (Aug., 1867), 229-246.

⁴⁰ Ibid., XXI (Jan., 1868), 17-36.

⁴¹ Ibid., XXIV (Aug., 1869), 216-231.

⁴² Ibid. (Sept., 1869), pp. 361-378. Reprinted in book form. See James Parton, Topics of the Time (Boston, 1871).

⁴³ Ibid. (Nov., 1869), pp. 517-533. Reprinted in Topics of the Time, as are the other two which follow.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (Dec., 1869), pp. 645-661.

⁴⁵ Ibid., XXV (Feb., 1870), 145-159. Also reprinted, but under the title "How Congress Wastes Its Time."

We are but serving an apprenticeship in the art of government by the whole people. We have done very well hitherto. Evils have arisen, but they have been grappled with and suppressed. Evils exist, but there is no reason to think that the recuperative energy of the system is near exhaustion. It is only people who do not know much about the period of Washington and John Adams, who think the government was better then than it is now. It is better now, upon the whole, than it was then; and much better, considering how difficult a task governments now have. In its worst state, it was better than the best despotism. 46

Parton considered logrolling and lobbying foremost among the nation's evils. Combinations furthering the interests of wealthy corporations over the people's welfare were already recognized in this early era of big business for the menace they were. The critic thought Congress and journalism were in the same boat, with directors and stockholders threatening the independence of both.⁴⁷

Parton likewise was amazed at the number of petty employees and the wasteful disposition of jobs fostered by Congress. Climbing the stairway to the Senate gallery after a visit to the Supreme Court, the author and his wife came into an avenue of fourteen bewildering doors. The corridor was a "paradise of door-keepers." Each door had an attendant on either side, zealously holding the handle as if in fear that the pretext for his being on the payroll might vanish if he did not take care. Nor was it only outside the chambers that there was an obviously excessive number of Congressional servants. Within there seemed more page boys than members. The comparatively small amount of money these retainers were paid was unimportant: what he did deplore was the absurd exhibition of waste and extravagance. Congressmen, too, seemed content to have their lives cluttered by a needless mass of detail.

Parton wondered why members of Congress were not more ready to cut unnecessary expenses and raise their own salaries to suit the dignity of their offices. The low wages Uncle Sam paid his servants he thought equally shortsighted. Good government, he insisted, presupposed the enlistment of the foremost leaders, lawyers, and experts, and it was right and proper that the salary paid be on a par with that obtainable by such persons in nongovern-

^{46 &}quot;Congressional Peccadilloes," Topics of the Time, pp. 93-94.

⁴⁷ "Log Rolling at Washington," *ibid.*, p. 284.
⁴⁸ "Congressional Peccadilloes," *ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

[&]quot;How Congress Wastes Its Time," ibid., pp. 201-202.

ment service. Parton had found certain Supreme Court justices unable to retire for lack of pensions and orphaned daughters of others eking out a bare living as copyists.⁵⁰ There was no excuse for such treatment. All these evils, he declared, boiled down to the careless and expensive bureaucracy which had developed out of the spoils system.

VIII

In this same period Parton wrote an ironic "Manual for Rings"—a bitter tirade exposing the corrupt power of railways and the methods they used to control legislation.⁵¹ The watchword of all such "rings," the writer asserted, lay in one word, control. Two or three simple axioms were laid down:

That "Ring" will obtain the greatest possible influence which subserves the Democratic party of America, and does not allow active members to hold elective office as a general rule. . . .

That "Ring" can coerce people of any section or state most readily, which acts on the assumption that sovereign power, legally held by the legislature, is only to be feared, and that it is easier to school a legislator by direct negotiations than by attempting to school the population which is a constituency.⁵²

The Chicago and Northwestern Railway, whose officers Parton dubbed with the special titles of Grand Concocted (William B. Ogden, president) and Grand Legalizer (Samuel Tilden, trustee), was especially dealt with. The Grand Concocter's Plausible Report for 1865, The Original Galena Stock Holders' Losses, the Variety of Bonds Issued, and finally the "Fancy Capital" issued at over \$20,000,000—all these hypothetical reports combined to give a notion of the corrupting political force which fleeced its investors and hoodwinked the public. With bitter sarcasm Parton built up his case; exaggeration was seldom used in a more telling manner. The web was growing wider, Parton warned, while the Ring's powerful associates in politics and in the press made a mockery of any crusade the people might wage.

This forceful broadside attracted much attention, and Parton

⁵⁰ "Uncle Sam's Treatment of His Servants," ibid., pp. 1-29.

⁵¹ James Parton, Manual for the Instruction of "Rings," Railroad and Political, with A History of the Grand Chicago and Northwestern "Ring" and the Secret of Its Success in Placing An Over-issue of Twenty Millions with a Margin of Three Millions in Three Years (New York [American News Company], 1866). Called "Abridged Edition," yet no other is known to exist.

⁵² Ibid., p. 17. ⁵³ Ibid., passim.

was urged to write others of a similar nature. In 1868 he was approached about writing a pamphlet advocating the completion of the plan for purchasing the Virgin Islands from Denmark. In the previous year Secretary Seward had started negotiations for this purchase, but his act was unofficial and of questionable propriety; the Senate, standing on its constitutional prerogatives and uninterested in acquiring Caribbean possessions, turned down his proposal.⁵⁴ This caused considerable embarrassment between the two countries, since Denmark had already ratified the proposed treaty.

Parton was an easy touch for any "cause." Among those interested in the affair who urged his active interest was Jessie Benton Fremont, whom he had met on one of his Washington visits.55 He accepted the offered assignment and wrote a pamphlet which was published under the title, The Danish Islands: Are We Bound in Honor to Pay for Them? 56 The government, he argued, had incurred an obligation in this matter and was bound to honor it. Parton set forth the wisdom of the original suggestion of purchase, citing the opinions of experts who considered the islands well worth the established price.⁵⁷ That the pamphlet was directed by the Danish Legation is undisputed. Raasloff, the Danish minister, furnished Parton with confidential documents, told him of conversations connected with the deal, and otherwise aided the argument. He later termed the publication "a masterpiece,"58 though it was ineffectual in obtaining the reversal by the Senate of its decision. Parton's tie with the Danish Legation and still more his acceptance of a thousand dollars for writing the pamphlet⁵⁹ have been justly criticized. His theses, however, were correct. Other observers-among them Henry Adams, writing a year later in the North American Review⁶⁰—agreed with Parton that we were "honor bound" by the agreement of 1867.

⁵⁴ Charles C. Tansill, The Purchase of the Danish West Indies (Baltimore, 1932), pp. 135-136.

⁵⁶ Two letters, Jessie B. Fremont to Parton, undated (Parton Collection).
⁵⁶ Parton, The Danish Islands: Are We Bound in Honor to Pay for Them?
(Boston, 1869).

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁸ Tansill, op. cit., p. 126. A footnote quotes a letter from Raasloff to Baron Rosenour-Lehn, September 29, 1880, on Parton's work: "It was composed under my supervision, use being made of the material collected by me, and it is a masterpiece of its kind."

Fremont-Parton Correspondence, loc. cit.

⁶⁰ North American Review, CXI (July, 1870), 56-57.

The decade of the sixties marked a notable growth in the ability of James Parton to do other than biographical writing. Reviewers sometimes lamented that he spent so much time on minor efforts to the exclusion of larger works such as those on which his fame rightly rested, but Parton, America's first professional writer, was restrained by the necessity of earning his daily bread. The income from his biographies, successful as they were, was not sufficient to compensate for his many months, or years, of labor and for the expenses of the research which had gone into their making. Magazine work was the most obvious alternative.

CHAPTER TEN

TOPICS FOR DISPUTE

SERIOUS AND SCHOLARLY writing, even including the field of readable and popular biography, was not sufficient in itself to support the practitioner. James Parton was completely dependent on writing for an income. Robert Bonner was willing to print whatever he submitted; Fields, too, welcomed everything his contributor wrote. Articles for the Atlantic Monthly required more effort than a paragraph or column in the New York Ledger: yet Parton, a pioneer in this field, attained a prosperity that would have amazed the literary apprentice who once wrote for compliments and an occasional theater ticket. He had an instinctive sense for what was readable, and suiting his style to whatever public he was addressing, he presented the facts with extraordinary vigor and clarity. One authority remarked that even statistics were interesting when Parton listed them.¹

Charles Eliot Norton, aware that Parton's works materially contributed to the North American Review's regeneration, la-

mented the scarcity of good critics:

The general want of tone and spirit in American criticism is an evil, the roots of which lie deep. It is hard to find anybody who knows enough to criticize who has also the ability to write a good criticism. The art of easy writing is very little understood among us. Our young men are too little trained in classical studies (against which you have as it seems to me a prejudice unworthy of your good sense) to acquire grace and skill of expression. Natural brightness of parts is not enough, it must be joined with art only to be acquired by study and practice. Your own style sometimes affords an admirable model of spirited, easy and effective writing, but occasionally (pardon the frankness) in your avoidance of dullness and magisterialness you seem to me to go too far in the other direction. To make good taste and elegance the first requisites in writing is to invert the natural order of things, but good taste and elegance are excellent and desirable when added to other qualities.

But who can I get to write with vigor, knowledge and good taste? I seek in vain for such writers. If you know the man who will write a critical notice with mastery of the subject, or with a light pointed

¹ John S. Hart, Manual of American Literature (Philadelphia, 1873), p. 398.

pen—who can give us a Saturday Review criticism—pray tell me of him.

I wish you would send me some notices. They are paid for at the same rates as other contributions.²

H

Magazines were beginning to take due note of important industrial inventions. Parton's articles on pianos, sewing machines and the like, taking their place beside the philosophical essays of Emerson and the delightful writings of Holmes and Howells, gave a new timeliness to the *Atlantic* and widened its appeal. The Boston magazine had a well-deserved reputation and a satisfactory subscription list, if puny in comparison with that of New York publications. Though the roster of contributors had lengthened after Fields's grasp of the editorial reins, there were many names on the list whose only merit lay in their provincial popularity.

Parton constantly suggested means through letters and in conversation to extend the horizon of his new audience—suggestions both wise and unwise. The sparkle in his articles showed itself also in his talk, and his wise and humane outlook often went beyond the narrower, though in their own way admirable, literary concepts of the Boston group. Mrs. Fields, the publisher's wife and a famous hostess, viewed Parton largely through the eyes of her literary associates. When James Russell Lowell, Parton, the Bayard Taylors, and Mr. and Mrs. Scot Siddons dined at the Fieldses' Charles Street house, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich dropped in afterwards, it was Lowell who "talked most interestingly, head and shoulders beyond everybody else . . . of literature, of course."3 The following day their New York guest suggested ideas for making the magazine more popular. They were noted in the entertaining journal of the publisher's wife, but nothing came of them; his urgent pleas that a "writer named Mark Twain be engaged" and that "more articles connected with life than with literature"4 be included were disregarded. Not until four years later, when William Dean Howells took over the editorial desk, did new blood course through the veins of the Atlantic.

² C. E. Norton to Parton, Oct. 1864 (?) (Parton Collection).

² M. A. de Wolfe Howe (ed.), Memories of a Hostess: A Chronicle of Eminent Friendships. From the diaries of Mrs. James T. Fields (Boston, 1932). Entry for November 19, 1868, p. 110.

Entry for Nov. 20, 1868, ibid., p. 111.

III

The sprightly letters between the author and his editor are notable for the many suggestive ideas of the writer. Parton had a flair for finding arresting topics, such as "Our Roman Catholic Brethren" and "Does it Pay to Smoke?" Fields termed them both "capital" subjects. In the next few months Parton got down to studying these subjects, which he had actually mulled over since early spring. Clearing his desk, he started the groundwork for an article against tobacco. He wrote Fields:

I want to know whether or not certain persons smoke: Does Mr. Longfellow? Does Mr. Emerson? Does Mr. Norton? Did Theodore Parker?

May I trouble you just to write yes or no after each of these questions. Tear off the leaf and send it back? To save you trouble, I enclose an envelope all ready directed.

You see I am making two lists: 1. Of all the illustrious smokers.

2. Of all the illustrious enemies of smoke.

General Grant . . . smokes 20 cigars a day. This I learn from one of his household. He has been trying to reduce his allowance and this is the cause of his occasional indispositions which keep him at home for a day or two. When he does not smoke all day, he must chew or be sick. He has thoroughly depraved his system by tobacco.

This you may rely on as true, but not publish.8

The editor replied immediately:

I happen to know Longfellow, Emerson and Norton smoke like so many chimmeys, but whether Theodore Parker smoked or not I never knew. Whenever I have met him at dinner he always avoided both wine and cigars. . . .

Your account of Grant shocks me. Who can write those Grant

papers better than J. P.?9

When "Does it Pay to Smoke?" appeared in the Atlantic, it was signed "By an Old Smoker." Ironically enough, nothing Parton ever wrote created more excitement.

When the manuscript first arrived in Boston, the editor knew he had a provocative piece. Mrs. Fields announced, "We think the Smoking article will produce a flame among the tobacco-loving

⁵ Parton to Fields, Sept. 14, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

⁶ Fields to Parton, Sept. 16, 1867 (Parton Collection).
⁷ Fields to Parton, April 15, 1867 (Parton Collection).

⁸ Parton to Fields, Nov. 10, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).
9 Fields to Parton, Nov. 12, 1867 (Parton Collection).

people in our country,"10 while her husband esteemed it "an admirable discourse" which warmed his soul. 11 Once an inveterate smoker, Parton had broken a habit of some thirty years standing and was eager to convert those still enslaved by the noxious weed. His logic, however, was feeble-merely negative evidence from their writings, he contended, showed that Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin were nonsmokers. Smoking was the enemy of women, too, he declared. It drove men from home and served as an excuse for failing to include women in such gatherings as the Press Dinner in honor of Dickens. Weak as the arguments may seem detached from their context, the writer's enthusiasm gave them unbelievable force. In conclusion, to those who wished to cure themselves of the smoking habit, he offered an odd prescription based on his own experience: take a swallow of good whiskey every time the urge attacks you.12

Reactions came thick and fast. In New York the ladies, Parton wrote, approved his article and contrived ways and means of making their husbands read it.13 It made small talk around many tables. Bayard Taylor, breakfasting at the Fieldses', maintained that tobacco seemed to subdue his physical energy, which otherwise made him nervously anxious to be up and away.14 Dr. Holmes, who was present, refused to take sides. Harriet Beecher Stowe, however, was delighted and congratulated him through

Fanny Fern:

I feel jubilant over Mr. Parton's article on Smoking and Drinking-It is true every word—and I am not without hope that it may do some good. I am in all the agony of exhortation and warning and argument with my Charley aged 17—who has tasted the evil tree—and vowed to abstain. 'Tis incredible in how many ways a boy who is trying to clear himself of this habit is everywhere tempted by those who should be examples—The clergy in our Episcopal Church are dreadful—The Apostolic Succession must be all smoke judging by them. Then, Doctors, Lawyers, Governors, Judges, all are smokers! . . . But for that work I thank your husband. Every little helps. . . . 15

Parton was deluged with letters on the article. Its success

¹⁰ Annie Fields to Parton, Jan. 13, 1868 (Parton Collection). 11 Fields to Parton, Dec. 6, 1867 (Parton Collection).

¹² James Parton, "Does it Pay to Smoke?," Atlantic Monthly, XXI (Feb., 1868), 129-145.

18 Parton to Fields, Jan. 29, 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

¹⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe to Fanny Fern, Feb. 15, 1868 (?) (Parton Collection).

led to another suggestion to Fields: "I am strongly inclined to try my hand, some day, at the other subject: 'Will the Coming Man Drink Wine?' The trouble is, I don't know whether he will or not, and I am not sure I could find out." 16

IV

Parton began to wade through temperance tracts to get data for the new article. He was amused at the many exaggerations in their pages, from Biblical cautions to the statement that Booth, already crazed, had dashed into a restaurant shouting "Brandy, brandy," and had had his fill thereof before entering Ford's

Theater to commit his bloody deed.17

His finished essay contained the usual list of eminent men who were abstainers and the forms of degeneracy which resulted from intemperance. Parton lauded the "natural man" who had, he thought, become doped and strained by civilization; who had become a creature "of eager desires, thin brains, excessive vanity and small self-control." The truth, Parton believed, had been discovered about alcohol, and the next hundred years would show that "truly helpful men will occupy themselves very much more in the physical welfare of the race, without which no other welfare is possible." 18

Fields termed "the grape-shot" excellent and immediately had it set up in type for the August issue of the magazine. Huzzahs from temperance groups were loud. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote

with her usual enthusiasm:

I invested the enormous sum of 37 (cents) when I got into the car that I might read your husband's article a few hours sooner—notwith-standing a dizzy head and disapproving of car reading I read it and I think it ought immediately to be printed and circulated as a tract—It has the one requisite generally lacking from all tracts. I think it is readable—in short it can't help being read. Dickens describes well a portion of tract literature when he says that if Robinson Crusoe had had nothing else for twenty years than that tract, he could never read it through, but this is one of the best specimens of good style in phrasing and putting a subject that ever was seen and I would like every young man of my acquaintance to read it.²⁰

In September, 1868, the two articles, together with one on

¹⁷ Atlantic Monthly, XXII (Aug., 1868), 200. ¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 189-207, passim.

19 Fields to Parton, May 29, 1868 (Parton Collection).

¹⁶ Parton to Fields, Feb. 29, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

²⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe to Fanny Fern, July 28, 1868 (Parton Collection).

"Inebriate Asylums," which appeared in a later issue of the Atlantic, were published as a pamphlet by Ticknor and Fields.21

New York magazines and newspapers did not take kindly to the work. The Nation, while it praised the "clear and incisive" way Parton addresed the average man, found it to be a collection of half-truths, interesting to read once, but "on the whole scientifically, artistically and morally often unprofitable reading."22 The New York World also devoted two columns to disapproval.

The reviewer in both cases was a young Harvard instructor who had lately arrived on the literary scene as critic and essayist.²³ John Fiske, aged twenty-six, exasperated by Parton's illogical assertions, decided to expand his two criticisms into a pamphlet.24 Having made satisfactory arrangements with Henry Holt for the publications of this, his first work to be issued under separate covers, he wrote to his mother to tell her of the big event:

I am writing a psychological but racy essay of 120 pages under the title "Tobacco and Alcohol: It Does Pay to Smoke-The Coming Man Will Drink Wine," (a criticism) of Mr. James Parton's book on "Smoking and Drinking" in which he maintains the two theses, The Coming Man will not Smoke nor will he drink wine. While in New York I worked one whole afternoon at the Astor Library and consulted many authorities. . . . Parton's book has sold very rapidly and this comes avowedly as an extinguisher to it.25

The Nation commended the finished product of its young contributor, though it chided him for boasting of only five weeks' labor on it.26 The pamphlet gave able but equally heated and exaggerated rebuttal to Parton's argument. In demolishing Parton's hastily built structure, Fiske and other critics lost sight of the interrogatory form of their opponent's titles and showed a complete lack of humor toward the whole matter. Parton had written his articles as personal essays and not as scientific monographs.

Parton was considerably irked at Fiske's attack and asked Fields for instructions.

²¹ Contract, dated Sept. 4, 1868 (Parton Collection), stipulated that the author would receive two hundred dollars outright as full consideration for the

²² Nation, VII (Nov. 12, 1868), 396-397.

John Spencer Clark, John Fiske, Life and Letters (Boston and New York,

^{1919),} p. 335.

24 Henry Holt, Sixty Years as a Publisher (London, 1924), p. 108.

25 Edith Fiske (ed.), Letters of John Fiske (New York, 1940), John Fiske to his mother, Nov. 20, 1868, p. 179.

²⁶ Nation, VIII (Jan. 7, 1869), 113-114.

There is a book by an attache of the Herald against our book on Smoking and Drinking. Unfortunately, the author is a blackguard, and thus we are deprived of a good chance to make another article in reply. But if you think it best the book should be replied to, speak, lord, and thy servant heareth. I am full of matter on that subject.²⁷

Fields was content to let the matter ride. As for the bumptious young critic whose pamphlet displayed the authoritative stamp "by John Fiske, M.A., LL.B."²⁸ he regarded his own handiwork with contentment. He reported to his sister Sarah:

We have heard from Parton indirectly. One of John Brook's friends called on him, and led the conversation onto smoking and so on. Parton said he had got "that book"—referring to "Tobacco and Alcohol" upstairs but hadn't had time to read it yet (!) He seemed, however, mighty well acquainted with its contents; said there was no use arguing because he was right,—that's just what I said in my book you know—moreover he thought it would be beneath his dignity to answer "that book"; from all of which Mr. Parton's friends drew the correct inference that Mr. Parton felt himself floored.

You perceive that the newspaper talk about Mr. Parton's "pluck" is not quite correct. Most men of his stamp, who set themselves up for oracles without having had a Scholarly Education, or having ever learned what such an education is, are timid rather than plucky when they get a good stiff blow in the ribs. According to my notions, a man who tries to instruct the public on a subject which he has never taken the pains to study, is more or less of an impostor—not by any means merely because I disagreed with him—that I treated him so contemptuously in my book. If I had supposed him to be a genuine seeker after truth, I should have written in a very different tone, of course.²⁹

Some years later, Parton made a personal experiment in total abstinence. He wrote to his family, then in Newburyport:

The other evening . . . I fell in with Theodore Tilton and some of his lawyers—Gen. Prior, Judge Morris and others—and they all came round to my hotel and sat down in the dining-room and had a regale—to the great delight of all the waiters and people. The joke was this: I alone drank nothing and preached a regular temperance lecture while they drank champagne. I said among other things: "How much better I shall feel tomorrow morning than any of you!" The

Parton to Fields, Nov., 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

p. 182.

²⁸ John Fiske, "Tobacco and Alcohol: It does pay to smoke. The coming man will drink wine" (New York, 1868).
²⁹ Edith Fiske (ed.), Letters, John Fiske to Sarah Fiske, March 17, 1869,

next morning I had one of the greatest headaches of the century!! Such is virtue.³⁰

After two months of "loss and suffering," he gave up. "It was impossible to go on any longer, unless I stopped work," he wrote them. "Yesterday I took two glasses of claret and feel every symptom abated."³¹

Readers of Parton are impelled to wonder if perhaps he were not often tempted to surrender to his old adversary John Fiske and conclude that the latter was right, that "the coming man" would indeed quaff the sparkling cup. Not until ten years later did Parton's persistence lead him to successful abstinence.

v

Sandwiched between the smoking and drinking articles, two installments on "Our Roman Catholic Brethren" appeared in the *Atlantic*. In Saint Louis the author had been much impressed with the old French quarter of the city and the large number of Roman Catholic churches and schools. Reared in a stern Calvinist tradition and having revolted against its suppressions, he had found the free and Continental spirit of the Mississippi town very appealing. After finishing the article on that city, he proposed a study of the Roman Catholic Church in the country at large.³²

Many factors contributed to Parton's interest in the rapidly growing hierarchy. An agnostic, he had been amazed by the severe economies piously practiced by two servant girls in his own household in order to educate their brother for the priesthood and by their final dedication of their own lives to the Church. And of course the discipline which filled churches from early morning to the vesper hour was itself impressive. The author reflected upon the subject for half a year before he got down to studious research. At the end of a month's steady work, he reported to his editor: "I am hunting down the Catholics still. It is an enormous subject. I hope well of it, but it is a great long job."33 The topic was fascinating, and the color and drama of the Mass attracted in a way the stark worship of the Calvinists never had. And there was the forceful personality of Father Hecker, a convert with all a convert's zeal, who had founded the Paulist Fathers and was editor of the Catholic World. The more

³⁰ Parton to his family, March 23, 1875 (Parton Collection).
³¹ Idem to idem, April 21, 1875 (Parton Collection).

²² Parton to Fields, March 18, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).
⁸³ Idem to idem, Dec. 27, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

Parton studied, the more fascinated he became. The letters he wrote to Fields were full of enthusiasm, even if underneath there were abysses of doubt. "I am really alarmed at their power, their progress, their confidence. Heavens! How can you explain such a phenomenon as Father Hecker? . . They are using all our dodges for roping in the proselytes." So big was the subject that his suggestion of two articles was followed. 35

Fanny Fern twitted her husband about his absorption in the subject of Catholicism.³⁶ Parton himself felt impelled to write Fields that any charge of a pro-Catholic bias would be cleared by the end of the second article. In the same letter he suggested that he might do a series of articles on other religious groups—"Our Israelitish Brethren," "Our Methodist Brethren," "Our Episcopalian Brethren"; but on second thought, he decided that he disliked the latter two denominations so much that he could not properly undertake to write about them.³⁷

Fields was as delighted with the second installment as he had been with the first and observed that it read superbly in type.³⁸ The Catholics felt that their bread had not been cast upon the waters, and anti-Catholic bigots failed to cause the trouble that the author had expected.³⁹ The excursions into the religious field were completed the following year with an article "Our Israelitish

Brethren, 3740

VI

In 1869 and 1870 two sensational events shook the literary world. Gail Hamilton launched, in book form, an attack on the firm of Ticknor and Fields, her publishers, and Harriet Beecher Stowe aired the Byron scandal in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*. In both these controversies the Partons were more than spectators.

In September, 1869, Gail Hamilton, a journalist and writer privately known as Mary A. Dodge, wrote to Parton:

I believe I have the honor to be one of your antipathies, so I shall be sure of your attention. Did you not write at one time and publish in the Atlantic Monthly an article about publishing and publishers in

³⁴ Idem to idem, Jan. 21, 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

³ Ibid.

³⁶ Marshall, Butler Correspondence, V, 719.

³⁷ Parton to Fields, Jan. 29, 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

³⁸ Fields to Parton, Feb. 19, 1868 (Parton Collection).

²⁹ Parton to Fields, Feb. 19, 1869 (Huntington Memorial Library).
⁴⁰ Atlantic Monthly, XXVI (Oct., 1870), 385-403.

which you spoke eulogistically and particularly of the House of Ticknor and Fields-mentioning among other things that they had been known to pay a poor author for manuscripts which they could not use? 41

She minced no words as to the Boston firm's treatment of her. "I believe them to be mean and tricky to the last degree," she wrote; "they pay well perhaps where they can make a noise about it . . . but where they think it is safe to screw-pardon the wordthey screw unmercifully." Gail Hamilton was determined to write a book telling how she had been mistreated, although she had been warned that "newspapers will not dare to notice it for fear of giving offense."42

The Partons sympathized though they advised caution. But the case was already past calm consideration; in her next letter she aired her grievances and woes at still greater length.43 She could not be swerved from her determination to ridicule the Boston firm in print. When the book was published,44 the Nation found the crux of the situation in Miss Hamilton's complete misapprehension as to publishers' costs. She should have met Fields vis-àvis and informed herself about customary financial arrangements between author and publisher.45

As for James Parton, his relationship with Ticknor and Fields was always a happy one. He wrote to Clark, the treasurer of the firm:

I shall have to write a small book to go with Gail Hamilton's. But then, no one will be able to understand why you should behave like princes to me and like Israelites to her. It will be set down as another instance of the inscrutable inconsistency of man.46

VII

At the same time that Gail Hamilton was unloading her troubles on the kindly shoulders of the Partons, the Byron scandal broke upon the peaceful autumnal air. Heads were to sway, pens to scratch and quiver, and irate subscribers to deal their favorite magazine a nearly crushing blow. The story was not a surprise either to Parton or to his wife. Before Mrs. Stowe set pen to paper, indeed before she had written Dr. Holmes for final advice.

⁴¹ Mary A. Dodge to Parton, Sept. 15, 1869 (Parton Collection). ⁴² Mary A. Dodge to Faron, Sept. 13, 1869 (Parton Collection).
⁴³ Idem to idem, Oct. 11, 1869 (Parton Collection).
⁴⁴ Gail Hamilton, The Battle of the Books (New York, 1870).

⁴⁵ Nation, X (March 27, 1870), 209.

⁴⁶ Parton to Clark, March 29, 1870 (MS Collection, Boston Public Library).

she had laid her plans before the Partons and accepted their dictum in the matter.

The miserable story of Lady Byron and the treatment accorded her by her unfaithful husband had been carefully concealed until after her death. When Mrs. Stowe first visited England, she had met Lady Byron and formed an affectionate attachment to her which was later cemented through an understanding correspondence. On her second visit to England, she was summoned by Lady Byron to a private conference. The tale told the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was so shocking, one so personal and hideous, that Mrs. Stowe stayed the hand of that much maligned person from writing the story herself. It was decided between them that some trusted friend should give to the world the true account of Lady Byron's sacrifices after her death.⁴⁷

When Lady Byron died, the story was still untold. The publication of aspersions of Lady Byron's memory by the poet's mistress, however, and an article in *Blackwood's Magazine* moved Mrs. Stowe to give to the public this story of a faithful wife and her incestuous spouse. Confident of the righteousness of her decision, she wrote her New York friends, "I have vowed a vow that I will tell the truth, and as the proverb says, 'Shame the

devil' as soon as I am able."48

Parton agreed that what she felt she must do, she should do. Accordingly, four weeks later, she sent her manuscript to Oliver Wendell Holmes for suggestions in phrasing the unpleasant account. After some hesitation he did as she asked. When the manuscript finally reached the *Atlantic's* desk, Howells, then acting editor in Fields' absence, accepted it. In July Mrs. Stowe wrote to Fanny Fern:

My DEARLY BELOVED SARAH:

... I am just as scared as I can be for I have done just as your Jim told me to—and it's all in print in the September Atlantic and now I feel greatly frightened at what I have done and ready to hide behind a door.

But it is right and just, I am sure. It would be a shame to let that dear angel bear the whole fault and shame of that guilty life after her death as well as all her life—so I spoke. . . . There was never, and never will be, another woman like Lady Byron—If Jim had seen her, he never could have had another doubt of the immortality of the

48 Harriet Beecher Stowe to Parton, June 1, 1869 (Parton Collection).

⁴⁷ Annie Fields (ed.), Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe (Boston and New York, 1899), pp. 319-322.

soul and final triumph of good—it was as seeing an angel right from the other side. 49

When the bomb finally fell, the avalanche of derision and serious adverse criticism was devastating. The accusations against Byron were almost universally denied by the press both in England and in America. A few magazines and newspapers, among them the Nation, honored Mrs. Stowe for the sincerity with which she had defended her friend.⁵⁰ Parton stood staunchly by his friend; by spoken word and by his pen, he backed her up. He asked Butler, who had earlier sent him a "brief" in defense of Byron,⁵¹ if he did not think there was "some ugly truth" veiled in the published letters of those who posed as authorities on the Byron affair. "Mrs. Stowe is steadfast in the faith," Parton wrote. "One of two things is true: Either the incest was committed, or Lady Byron was mad. My only care is to vindicate Mrs. Stowe, whose conviction of the truth of her story was complete, and whose motives were entirely honorable." ⁵²

Parton's sympathy for Mrs. Stowe was deepened by the knowledge that he had encouraged her in her decision. Both he and his wife expressed regret at the criticism hurled at her. Mrs. Stowe, in answer, poured out her heart to them:

SARAH AND JIM, GREETING-

Did you think it was for myself I cared? It was not. It was grief, shame, wonder, mortification and an almost inability to believe my eyes and senses such as I had only once before seen when all the world—Christian and political and social of America—seemed to go down with one ear and one knee before the Fugitive Slave Law.

But I had a high idea of the chivalry of America for women and therefore took from my bosom a name dear to me as that of my own mother and cast it down before them. It appears it was casting pearls before swine—of course the poor pigs know not what they do but the discovery of so many of that class is painful to me. Never again shall I say as I did before that America is a land where a woman is sure of defenders! In all your speakings, speak for her . . . the war of the American press going across the ocean has frightened the family who have the proof—so I gather from the solicitor's letter. The thing to do is for every literary man to call on them to publish Lady Byron's Life and Letters. She kept a journal, she corresponded with most of

⁴⁹ Harriet Beecher Stowe to Fanny Fern, July 25, 1869 (Parton Collection). ⁵⁰ Nation, IX (Aug. 26, 1869), 167.

⁵¹ Parton to Benjamin F. Butler, Sept. 18, 1869 (Butler Correspondence, Library of Congress).

⁵² Parton to Butler, Sept. 23, 1869 (Butler Correspondence, Library of Congress).

the distinguished persons of Europe and America—she was a splendid writer on all subjects and possessed more knowledge than any person I met in England and it all has been locked away from the world because this guilty secret was the key to all—to bring up her child in ignorance . . . hope ever springing, ever for victory of love over hate and good over evil and finally when all was over to tell the whole truth for History—such was her wonderful work and it raises you in my estimation James Parton that you are one of the elect men who are found worthy to understand such a woman. Use all your power with the press. Conciliate, smoothe, pacify, make friends for her sake—and make a call, a cry, for her memoirs that may embolden her family to give them. I have drawn the lightning from the cloud. They are welcome to abuse me.⁵³

The effect of Mrs. Stowe's article on the Atlantic Monthly's subscription list was instantaneous: withdrawals caused the circulation to drop from 50,000 to 35,000 in a month.⁵⁴ The publishers, however, had the courage to issue the article, with some additions, in book form, and Mrs. Stowe's steadfast friends, such as the Partons, continued to work for her vindication. Understanding was not to be had in a generation, but the truth that Mrs. Stowe had been the first to set forth was ultimately established.

VIII

The years with the Atlantic Monthly were happy ones. Parton now took his place among the leading writers of his time. The Atlantic essays in themselves made a full schedule; in addition, the author wrote many fugitive pieces, frequently contributed to Bonner's Ledger, and spent much time in editing collections of biographical essays. In June, 1870, he came to the end of his contract with the Atlantic. Though it had brought pleasant friendships, it had pushed him too hard. His health had become affected by the pressure of his craft. He laid down his pen with relief and sought the long rest which he had won.

The family sought the solitude of the Maine coast. Here Parton was to work out plans for the future, away from pressing problems and the desk to which he had been tied, physically and mentally, almost without surcease for four years. Fields pleaded with him in vain. If it were possible, he had come near to writing himself out. Discouraged by the relatively small financial reward he obtained, he sought some other connections to vary the hours until, refreshed, he might return to his desk.

64 Mott, History of American Magazines, II, 505.

⁵³ Harriet Beecher Stowe to the Partons, n.d. (Parton Collection).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE TRAILBLAZERS

THE PARTONS were familiar figures in Manhattan's social and literary coteries. James Parton was tall, slender, and bearded. A dark cape and high-topped boots were distinguishing habits of his dress. His wife was much older, but the difference between them seemed less than it really was. She usually dressed in black. A large woman, she stepped lightly, and her poise and

stately bearing were apt to attract attention.

Writing in her column about the celebrities who walked the streets of New York, Fanny Fern had once touched off her husband thus: "Here he comes, James Parton, who doesn't believe in the devil." The tag was quoted by a writer on the Louisville Journal, who added: "Ah, Fanny, that was before he was married: Are you sure he doesn't believe in the devil now?" Rumors of Fanny Fern's tempestuous nature were current in many quarters. But the long tension between Mrs. Parton and her husband had lessened. He was full of admiration for her as a woman of both talent and charm, and her regard for him had no limits.

ΤT

In 1862 there came a precious addition to the Parton household. One of Fanny Fern's daughters, Ellen Eldredge, was still living with the Partons; the other, Grace, married to Mortimer Thomson in the spring of 1861, had died at the end of the following year, leaving a baby girl.³ The baby, Ethel Thomson, whom they affectionately called Effie, was taken into the family, and her every act called forth cries of delight from members of the household. James Parton fell completely under her spell. The child brought great happiness to the sometimes harried author; he grew to love her as his own and followed her every move with deep affection. More important, the infant became a uniting force for the household. Years later Parton told his old

¹ Clipping, Boston Globe (March 4, 1880?) (Parton Collection).
² James Parton, Eminent Women of the Age (Hartford, 1886), p. 79.

⁸ Family Records, Parton Collection. Mortimer Thomson's first wife also died at an early age. After a few years he married Grace Eldredge. By common consent the Partons brought up their child Ethel. Thomson at this period was a Civil War correspondent for the *Tribune*. He died in 1875.

friend, Harriet Prescott Spofford, "if he lived a thousand years, and served her in them all, he could never repay the child for all the happiness he owed her in bringing light into his darkness."

Fanny Fern was a typical grandmother and in her effervescence could not keep little Effie and her charms out of her *Ledger* columns. These were filled with the baby's ways. "She is my poem," she told Grace Greenwood, and to her readers confessed, "With shame and confusion of face, I own that child governs me."

III

Both the Partons loathed everything that smacked of cant, hypocrisy, and sham.⁷ In her own way Fanny Fern was a crusader in the *Ledger* paragraphs, just as her husband in his pamphlets and many of his magazine articles. She pointed out the deplorable conditions existing in city life, emphasized the difficult estate of women, and begged for a more understanding attitude toward children, who in that day were condemned "to be seen and not heard." While some of her "Fern Leaves" wilted in short time, others carried constructive and fertile suggestions. Meanwhile, James Parton, in his firm, sure way, dragged unsavory facts from their hiding places and forced them upon the notice of a lethargic public.

The first and most notable article written by Parton in this period was the ironic study, "How New York City is Governed," which appeared in the October, 1866, issue of the North American Review. This account of corruption in the nation's largest city gave the initial impetus to the campaigns waged shortly afterwards

against the city's notorious political "ring."

Parton's power as a tract writer was by this time evident. In his Manual for Rings he had made his first attempt to smoke out the corrupt politics fostered by combinations and monopolies. Now his exposure of New York misgovernment riveted the attention of those citizens who had either overlooked or underestimated the evils which they knew existed. The discovery of such civic conditions was not new. A Citizens Association had been formed, and Henry Ward Beecher preached against these

⁴ H. P. Spofford, "James Parton," Writer, V (Nov., 1891), 232.
⁵ Eminent Women of the Age, p. 84.

New York Ledger, June 30, 1866. Eminent Women of the Age, p. 76.

^{*} North American Review, CIII (Oct., 1866), 413. Also see Parton, Topics of the Time, pp. 350-401.

conditions, but nowhere had the attack been so well-dramatized as in Parton's account. His study was searching and every aspect of the control exercised by William Tweed, the Tammany chieftain, was laid bare. The author, unlike many later writers who attacked "the shame of our cities," was not content to expose and be done with his subject. With a thorough understanding and appreciation of the interdependent parts of the political machine, he offered practical suggestions for putting it out of commission.

The effect of the article was electric. New York newspapers quoted from it at length, preachers flayed the politicans as they never had done before, and citizens who hitherto had formed weak reform leagues were spurred to vigorous action.¹⁰ Tammany leaders turned threateningly toward their assailant,¹¹ but the writer did not quail.

The *Times* of London devoted four columns of quotations from Parton's work and comments upon its significance. After describing the magnificence of the city, it pointed out:

New York is degraded and plundered by its civic government, and this government has become an evil so intolerable that it seems as if there must shortly be an uprising against it . . . as we read we cease to wonder that the soul of the writer has been moved. 12

New York slowly awoke. Parton's article was republished in pamphlet form, and many copies were sold under the auspices of the Citizens Association.¹³ Consistent municipal reform, however, was an uphill task, and remedial efforts lagged. The next year Boss Tweed was on his way to Albany as a newly elected member of the New York legislature, a body which he soon controlled as completely as he had for years controlled his city's Board of Aldermen.¹⁴ But Parton's clarion call did much to rouse the civic conscience of New Yorkers. By 1871 the New York Council of Political Reform was organized, and in the autumn of that year the reform cause gained further support from the press.

^o Topics of the Time, pp. 352-378. Also see Gustavus Myers, The History of Tammany Hall (2nd ed. rev. and enl.; New York, 1917), pp. 209 et seq.

¹⁰ Parton to Fields, Oct. 24, 1866 (Huntington Memorial Library). "That new article continues to be talked and written about: yea, even preached about..."

¹¹ Miss Ethel Parton, the niece, recollected hearing of attempts at recrimination (as told the writer).

¹² London Times, Nov. 3, 1868.

¹⁸ James Parton, How New York City Is Governed (Boston, 1866). Reprinted from the North American Review.

¹⁴ Myers, op. cit., p. 210.

The New York *Times* fired what proved to be the opening gun of a big drive against Tammany. It was *Harper's Weekly*, however, and especially its cartoonist, Thomas Nast, with his

biting caricatures, which brought ultimate victory.16

Parton had been a lone swimmer against a mighty current, but his indignation never cooled. Fanny Fern shared his civic wrath, and as they walked about the city with their little grandchild, the Partons made her see with their eyes everything about them. One day, on a stroll with her grandmother, young Ethel pointed to a palace of a house and asked who lived there. Fanny's eyes flashed as she replied, "a thief and a robber." It was the house of one of the favorites of Tweed.¹⁷

In 1881 the Civil Reform Association reprinted a portion of Parton's Life of Andrew Jackson as a pamphlet entitled The Beginning of the Spoils System in the National Government, 1829-30.18

IV

Parton's interest in international copyright was first shown in a letter to the *Tribune* in June, 1851. Sporadic efforts of English and American authors since 1836 to secure an international solution for the piracy of literature seemed of no avail.¹⁹ In 1864 the publishers George Palmer Putnam, Henry Ivison, and Henry Holt, together with certain authors—Bryant, Bristed, Stedman, and others—formed an International Copyright League. According to Holt, it "accomplished nothing because some leading pub-

¹⁵ E. P. Tanner, "Post War Problems" in Alexander C. Flick (ed.), Modern Party Battles ("History of the State of New York," Vol. VII [New York,

1935]), p. 151.

Curiously enough, Parton himself, pioneer reformer though he was, discouraged Nast in his crusade. Nast was an old friend of his and his cousin by marriage; perhaps it was the thought of the personal danger involved in the crusade that made Parton try to hold him back. Miss Ethel Parton thought it might have been the added concern for Nast's children, to whom her uncle was devoted. He wrote Nast: "They will kill off your work. You will come out once a week—they will attack you daily. They will print their lies in large type, and when any contradiction is necessary, it will be lost in an obscure corner. You can never withstand their assaults, much less hope to win" (Parton letter quoted in Paine, Th. Nast, His Period and His Pictures, p. 142).

17 Ethel Parton, "A Girlhood in Stuyvesant Square," New Yorker, X (Sept.,

1936), 58.

¹⁸ James Parton, The Beginnings of the Spoils System in the National Government, 1829-30 (New York, 1881). Published for the Civil Reform Association. No. 2.

No. 2.

10 Frederick Saunders, "Early History of the International Copyright Movement in America." For the Astor Library, 1888. MS in the New York Public Library.

lishers, and virtually all printers, preferred free piracy."²⁰ Parton's youthful appreciation of this problem had grown with the publication of each of his biographies; yet whatever he did for the cause had its origin in his sense of justice rather than in personal interest.²¹

The thwarting of the attempt to revive national action roused the biographer. He now turned his literary skill to a defense of American and English authors against the dishonest trafficking in a writer's commodities. His article on "International Copyright" appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for October, 1867; in it he dwelt on the basic justice of the proposed act and on the impetus it would give to American authorship. He wrote of the years of labor and the thousands of dollars Prescott, Motley, and Bancroft had spent on their magnificent histories and the absurdly small returns they had received. It was fortunate, he said, that these men were willing workers and possessed the means to engage in a lifetime of research. For Harriet Beecher Stowe, on the other hand, it was a serious matter that she was unable to reap the benefits of her international fame or to obtain theater rights in her great novel against slavery. Dr. John W. Draper, the historian and scientist of New York University, taught all day to earn a living and at four in the afternoon began his scholarly writing, because American publishers did not pay sufficiently, preferring to pour their money into the "Courtesy of Trade." There was no room for the work of native writers, Parton argued, when the cheap reprints of foreign books could be got out by publishers for only a paper-and-ink investment. Thus under the existing system the best works often failed to bring reward. Cheap, "scissors-and-paste" biographies were peddled by a thousand agents gaining easy money for the publishers, while the gems of Emerson, less touted, brought the author little profit in his own land and none at all abroad. Parton believed all reputable publishers were in favor of the copyright law with the exception of the publishers of Webster's Dictionary. Authors were no less heartily in favor of it.22 It was difficult to understand why the law did not meet with strong Congressional support.

²⁰ Holt, op. cit., pp. 87-98.

²¹ Fanny Fern's books had gained international fame—the "Fern Leaves" sold 48,000 copies in England, but the sale of his own biographies abroad at the time was not large. See *Allibone*, II, 1520.

²² Atlantic Monthly, XX (Oct., 1867), 430-451; or, Topics of the Time, pp. 96-131.

The response to the article was encouraging. The popular writer, Josiah G. Holland, wrote to Parton:

I have been a "successful writer." I have one of the best publishers in the country and one who has served me generously, yet with books that run up to 50,000 copies, I can only begin to support myself by copyright. Were it not for newspapers and lectures, I could not support my family and educate my children as they ought to be educated. 23

Parton's solution was to "keep 'pegging away' at it until the thing is done." He suggested that there should be "someone at Washington who should have nothing to do but [lobby for] International Copyright."²⁴

On January 30, 1868, some thirty or forty men, authors and publishers, met together in New York at the suggestion of Egbert Hazard, editor of the London American. The enthusiasm of the publishers when confronted with the real possibility of such a law was not as unanimous as it had been when they regarded it academically. G. P. Putnam and Henry Ivison favored it almost without qualification; the former pointed out that in the ten years prior to 1868 some seven hundred and fifty American books had been published in England, each without compensation to the author. Dissenting publishers were James Miller and Melancthon M. Hurd. Miller frankly did not believe in paying American authors more than they already received. There was much talk, he said, about the rights of poor authors and reminded the group that Putnam himself had spoken of paying some hundred thousand dollars to Irving in his lifetime. Hurd, more taciturn, refused to commit his firm until he knew more.25 The net result of this meeting was the appointment of a committee of five, with G. P. Putnam as chairman and James Parton as secretary.

As corresponding secretary, Parton immediately wrote to Senator Charles Sumner, urging the revival of the copyright question. Sumner replied:

23 J. G. Holland to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).

²⁴ Parton to J. G. Holland (MS Division, New York Public Library).
²⁵ Newspaper clipping (G. P. Putman Collection, MS Division, New York

²⁶ Charles Sumner to Parton, Feb. 17, 1868 (Parton Collection).

A circular letter was sent to publishers and authors, calling a meeting for April.²⁷ At the second meeting, held in May, a constitution was reported upon, and permanent officers were elected. William Cullen Bryant was chosen president: Henry Ivison, treasurer; Parton was re-elected corresponding secretary. Any unanimous agreement by those who attended, men who represented the rank and file of the literary profession, both writers and publishers, was almost impossible. Each clause had its supporters and objectors.28 Nevertheless, continued activity brought forth a bill which was introduced into the House of Representatives by J. D. Baldwin. Not until 1883, however, was Congress finally moved to action.

When, in 1867, Charles Dickens came to this country on his second lecture tour, Parton's interest in his coming was twofold: he was a great admirer of the distinguished novelist, and he knew that Dickens himself had tackled in no uncertain terms the crying shame of literary piracy. He wrote to his friend Fields, who was one of the heartiest supporters of the International Copyright movement:

But articles will never give us International Copyright. The way to get this, is for Mr. Longfellow to go to Washington, live three months there, and make 'em do it.

I envy you the happiness you are having with Mr. Dickens. Mr. Clarke has evidently quite lost his heart to him. The people here are in a wild frenzy about the readings. . . . 29

Two weeks later, in a letter filled with suggestions which he asked Fields to pursue after Dickens left Boston, Parton wrote of the mounting enthusiasm in New York for the coming lecture, predicting that the price of tickets would mount to a hundred dollars.30

When Dickens finally arrived in January, New Yorkers stampeded the neighboring borough of Brooklyn to hear the famous lecture in Beecher's church. Parton reported the reading ecstatically: "Immense audience last night, and all saturated with pleas-

²⁷ Specimen Copy (G. P. Putman Collection, MS Division, New York Public Library).

²⁸ Minute Book, International Copyright Association (G. P. Putman Collec-

tion, MS Division, New York Public Library).
29 Parton to Fields, Nov. 23, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library). 30 Idem to idem, Dec. 3, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

ure. Not a standing place vacant, not a heart unmoved. Let Dickens murder somebody and I'll forgive him. . . . "81

Fanny Fern was less impressed than her applauding husband. She wrote General Butler a cutting description of the novelistspeaker:

I have been to hear the great Dickens. I hate him. No old girl could be vainer. He travels about with a lot of men-millinery in the shape of becoming lights-a crimson screen behind to tone down the rubicund John Bulliam of his face. . . . Mr. Parton clapped his hands till they were blistered, when he heard him-and turning around to me with glowing face, said, "Fanny, what do you think of that?" "I hate him," said I, with my eyes on his two vests and the obnoxious rosebud. I wanted to see a man. He came very near getting a divorce from me, but I believe he has thought better of it, or else he is too busy. I'll let you know if he changes his mind! He is writing his Voltaire, and preparing an article for the Atlantic on the Roman Catholics. I think they will fetch him yet. . . . 32

The General in his turn was judicious. "You must permit Mr. Parton to clap and admire Dickens," he wrote. "He is English, you know, and fellow John Bulliam is a bond of sympathy all the world over. Pray God fervently that Mr. P. may never have any worse failing. . . . "33

Informal gatherings of newspaper men and other writers had long been a feature of New York's literary life. The more prominent ones had formed the Press Club, which met at stated intervals for dinners or luncheons at Delmonico's in Madison Square. As the time for Dickens's departure drew near, the Club decided to give him a farewell testimonial dinner.

The event was to have repercussions in literary society of the period and to have lasting effects on club life in America. As early as February 29, 1868—the Dickens dinner was held April 18— Parton tacked a postscript onto a letter to Fields: "There ought to be ladies at the Press dinner to Dickens."34 The gentlemen of the press, however, thought otherwise. Three women, each the wife of a club member, Mrs. David Croly (known as Jennie June), Mrs. Parton, and Mrs. Charlotte B. Wilbour-all notable members of the writing profession-applied for membership. The

³¹ Idem to idem, Jan. 10, 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

³² Marshall, Public and Private Correspondence of General B. F. Butler, V, 718-719.

*** Ibid., pp. 719-720.

³⁴ Parton to Fields, Feb. 29, 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

three bold applications were loudly joked about. At the eleventh hour, the ladies were informed that they might come if they paid the price of the dinner and came in sufficient numbers.³⁵ The wording was objectionable and the invitation met with curt refusal. There were no women present at the Press Club banquet.

When the event finally came off, "the display," according to the New York World, "surpassed everything of the kind in the history of banquets." Seated at the head table with the visiting author were American publishers and two writers; of the latter, James Parton was one, Robert Roe, the other. For the 204 guests who attended, it was a memorable occasion. The women writers meanwhile started a club of their own, which they called Sorosis—but at the same time they resolved to make sure that such distinguished gatherings as that of the Dickens dinner should in the future include them.

Fanny Fern had put herself on record as favoring women's rights, long before this occasion. In 1859 she wrote—in spite of her disinclination for personal publicity—that she would even be willing to attend a Woman's Rights Convention.³⁷ When the Civil War came, she was certain restrictions would be removed.³⁸ With Negro suffrage in the offing, it was mere common sense to expect that her sex would be emancipated. Yet the Civil War

brought no greater liberty to womankind.

Mrs. David Croly invited four prominent women to her Fourteenth Street home, where discussions were held about establishing a club for women, something like the Press Club for men. The start was not easy. Mrs. Henry Field, one of the four whom Mrs. Croly had invited to join, shortly afterwards resigned, ostensibly because of her long absences from the city. Mrs. Vincent Botta withdrew because of her husband's objections. Others less timid, however, soon swelled the ranks of these earnest instigators of a cultural movement. Mrs. Croly served the first fall term as president, and Fanny Fern in the first year of successful operation was elected one of six vice-presidents.³⁹ The membership was composed of the most prominent women leaders in

²⁵ J. G. Wilson, Memorial History of the City of New York (New York, 1893), IV, 260.
⁸⁶ New York World, April 19, 1868.

New York World, April 19, 1868.

New York Ledger, Nov. 26, 1859.

³⁸ Ibid., Dec. 28, 1861.

³⁹ Mrs. J. C. Croly, The History of the Women's Club Movement in America (New York, 1898), pp. 15-17. See also, Report of the Twenty-first Anniversary of Sorosis (New York, 1890), p. 25.

the city. Sorosis became the recognized mother club of all the other women's clubs which soon sprang up throughout the country.

Parton gave his wife unfailing support in her assertions of her rights and those of other women. Her thinking and her writing were indeed strongly influenced by his ideas, and he helped to deepen her insight into the significance of conditions of the city she lived in. At the same time her own keen eye supplemented Parton's vision. She wrote an article about working girls which was good enough in her husband's opinion for the Atlantic Monthly. Before long James Parton and Fanny Fern were attending Press dinners together. The year following the Dickens banquet, the men invited the members of Sorosis to their annual dinner, and both Mr. and Mrs. Parton took their places at the speakers' table. A band played, silk skirts rustled, and glasses were raised in honor of the ladies present and to "Women's Kingdom: if not kingdom come, it is kingdom coming."

Fanny Fern's enthusiasm for the improvement of women and the extension of the franchise was evident in her correspondence. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who recalled her as a "bright laughing witch, half saint, half sinner, in our school here in Hartford," ⁴³

replied to a request for an opinion:

Yes, I do believe in Female Suffrage—The more I think of it the more absurd this whole government of man over woman looks. . . . Seems absurd they dare not trust us with suffrage lest we become unworthy. . . . I should like to see what could make women other than women and men than men—the colors we are dyed in are warranted to wash. 44

Bound by the ties of their common profession and by their pioneer zeal for what each believed to be the cause of justice and truth, Parton and his wife drew ever closer together with the passing years. Each had respect for the other's ability. More than that, they shared a passionate devotion to the fundamental rights of mankind and held an implicit belief in the individual's opportunity for advancement. The memory of the years of unhappiness was being erased by a present full of common enthusiasms and of activities often jointly engaged in.

⁴⁰ Parton to Fields, Oct. 30, 1866 (Huntington Memorial Library).
⁴¹ Idem to idem, Dec. 18, 1866 (Huntington Memorial Library). "Mr. Bonner has gobbled up the article which Mrs. Parton proposed to send you."

44 Idem to idem, July 25 (1869?) (Parton Collection).

⁴² New York World, Nov. 28, 1869. ⁴³ Harriet Beecher Stowe to James Parton, Feb. 6, 1868 (Parton Collection).

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE END OF A CHAPTER

EIGHTEENTH STREET was lined with seemingly endless rows of brick and brownstone houses with iron and stone balustrades buttressing heavy double doors. Patches of green grass and an occasional flower-filled urn in the small enclosed areas between pavement and house broke the monotonous solidarity. The Partons lived three doors east of Second Avenue. Around the corner Stuyvesant Square with its porticoed houses and old church was not unlike some London counterpart. A few blocks west was Gramercy Park, enclosed by a high iron fence. Cater-cornered from the Partons lived the Hamilton Fishes, whose large garden gave the neighborhood a welcome oasis of bloom.

TT

The brownstone house numbered 303 was Fanny Fern's own, purchased with her Ledger money and from income derived from her books.¹ And in the popular mind it was Fanny Fern's. Well-known journalist as Parton was, he possessed no weekly audience of half a million readers who turned to his paragraphs with regularity as they did to Mrs. Parton's. A little girl from the country once eschewed the usual rounds of stores and amusements to walk down East Eighteenth Street one afternoon to discover for herself where the author of the Play-Day-Book and the Little Leaves lived. It was thrilling to find the windows thrown open and glimpse a canary in a cage beyond the flower-filled window ledges. It was exciting to relate on her return: "She lives in a big brown house, with the windows all open, and the rest of the people have theirs closed. I knew it was her house before I got there. The bird and the flowers told me so. . . ."2

Within, the Parton house was tasteful and simply decorated. The mantel over the fireplace was massed with the ferns Mrs. Parton loved and which had served as a talisman during her writing career. Notwithstanding its lack of ostentation, the Parton house was constantly entered by thieves. In her column

¹ Information from the Parton Collection. ² New York Evening Sun, June 18, 1892.

Fanny Fern protested her lack of treasures, most of which had already been taken, and jauntily suggested Secretary Fish's house as a likely source of spoils or, better yet, the house of Robert Bonner, whose goods, she wrote, had never been touched. As an upshot of this gratuitous advice, her editor's house was plundered the following week!³

There was little waste in the management of the household. There were two maids, and the establishment displayed gentility and at the same time a not too apparent thriftiness. Food was good and abundant, and the Partons wore clothes that were modish but not extravagant. Neither James Parton nor his financially independent wife piled up riches; they did not hesitate, when occasion arose, to make extra expenditures either for themselves or for others. Parton was most generous in giving and lending to friends and relatives. If money had a fashion of slipping away, it was not regretted.⁴

Both the Partons loved their home—particularly Fanny Fern, who shunned the public eye. It was she who took the conversational lead when guests called. Endowed with powers of mimicry and inimitable ability as a storyteller, she was a natural cynosure. Mr. Parton was wont to sit quietly in his chair as if wrapped in thought, but his preoccupied attitude did not annoy Fanny Fern, for when aroused by some particular sally of wit or discussion of a serious subject, he contributed his full share to the talk and showed himself a brilliant conversationalist.⁵

III

As the baby Effie grew older, she was the constant companion of the Partons on their long walks about the city, and to accompany them was an adventure. What they saw became alive to the grandchild. Sometimes there were afternoon trips as far as Central Park, which in the sixties was the great rendezvous of New Yorkers: Gramercy and Stuyvesant Squares were nearer playgrounds. Neither one of the Partons believed in acquaintance with the bright side of life alone; so strolls to the East River kept Effie from wondering what lay east of First Avenue. Summer vacations away from New York lengthened as the years went on. The city was no place for a child; as Fanny Fern commented on an

³ Fanny Fern: Memorial Volume, pp. 67-68. ⁴ Ethel Parton to the writer, March, 1940.

⁵ Unidentified newspaper clipping, 1870-1871(?) (Parton Collection).



ROBERT BONNER



urban-bred youngster, "It's old in fashion and crime before it is out of short frocks."6

This little girl reawakened Parton's love for children. His manner endeared him alike to Effie, the boys and girls of the neighborhood, and his nieces and nephews. When she grew older, Parton took up the task of instructing her. The delight which he had once felt in teaching returned, and his self-assignment became engrossing. Few children over enjoyed such opportunities.

James Parton and Fanny Fern practiced the simple life they urged upon others. The growing pretentiousness of the "society" of this commercially wealthy city was repugnant to both of them. They cared most for their friends of longest standing. When New Year's Day developed into a bacchanalian celebration, Mrs. Parton, like other too-much-sought-after New York hostesses, hung a basket for cards on the door knob, rather than open her house to the steady stream of those who came to call either in perfunctory fashion or out of curiosity.7 Their home was very much their castle.

Ever ready to admit that two pairs of eyes were better than one, Parton recognized that Mrs. Parton's quick perception was invaluable to him in his frequent travels in search of material. During the Civil War years, Washington was an exciting place. They visited there and went down to Fortress Monroe to spend ten days with the Butlers close to the scene of battle.8 All trips made good copy for Fanny Fern's Ledger columns as well as for Parton's own occasional contributions to it. When Parton turned to writing for the Atlantic Monthly, he had a vast store of experiences to draw upon.

The Partons particularly loved the mountains. In the early sixties their summers were spent in the Catskills, with some weeks at Saratoga and Lake George. In 1865 and 1869 they vacationed in Brattleboro, Vermont. The town offered many pleasant drives and walks and was a popular place for artists and writers, including William Dean Howells, who was to become Parton's editor and friend. Parton was greatly impressed with the cultural atmosphere of Brattleboro, as indeed he was with the charms of all New England.9

New York Ledger, June 8, 1865.

Ethel Parton, op. cit., p. 59.

Sarah Butler to Parton, May 21, 1864 (Parton Collection).

Atlantic Monthly, XXIII (Jan., 1869), 61-81; republished in Topics of the Time, pp. 52-53.

V

Parton constantly bent his efforts to help men and women of ability. In the course of the summer of 1867, which he and his family spent at Highgate Springs on Lake Champlain, he became interested in a young artist called Marshall Oliver. He encouraged him to write an article for the Atlantic dealing with previous experiences on the stage. Fields accepted the manuscript after Parton personally helped the author revise it according to the editor's suggestions. In the meantime, he was encouraging a "nice young fellow" in the Ledger office to write an account of "The Fast Horses in America." "It will," Parton wrote, "be one of the set-off articles to make relief for the Emersonian, Whippletonian pieces, and keep the New Yorkers from saying you are too literary." 12

The second protégé was less successful. Parton reported that the written article did not measure up to its subject matter.¹³ He stuck to his interest, however, and the paper was rewritten to the satisfaction of both patron and publisher. John Elderkin's essay on "The Turf and Trotting Horse in America" became the lead

article in the May Atlantic.14

VI

Parton's contract with the Atlantic Monthly called for a specified number of articles a year. The work necessitated a strict routine, and he wrote from his study, "I am almost always here, from 7 A. M. to 2 P. M.—and from 6 P. M. to 7½; often, all evening." The schedule was broken only by occasional research trips. But Parton's writing for the Atlantic did not provide enough income to depend upon it alone. He turned to editing vast quantities of his old work and to other writing which was little short of drudgery.

Several of his essays were republished by interested parties; "The History of the Sewing Machine," which had originally appeared in the *Atlantic*, was later issued in pamphlet form by

¹⁵ Parton to Charles Nordhoff, Dec. 18, 1866 (MS Collection, Harvard University).

¹⁶ James Parton, History of the Sewing Machine (Boston, 1868). Reprinted from the Atlantic Monthly (May, 1867). For other printings, see Parton bibliography.

¹⁰ Parton to Fields, July 10, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).
¹¹ Idem to idem, Sept. 22, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

¹² Idem to idem, Sept. 27, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

¹³ Idem to idem, Jan. 10, 1868 (Huntington Memorial Library).

¹⁴ Atlantic Monthly, XXI (May, 1868), 513.

various sewing machine manufacturers. Among the paperbacked booklets bearing his name as author was a Biographical Sketch of George W. Childs, 17 editor of the Philadelphia Public Ledger. The sketch was printed and reprinted, and Parton became a warm friend of the man about whom he had written.

Parton collected some of his old *Ledger* articles for book publication. After his Boston publishers had first looked over them, he signed a contract for the volume *People's Book of Biography: or Short Lives of the Most Interesting Persons of All Ages and Countries*, with A. S. Hale and Company of Hartford. Each sketch had appeared in Bonner's paper and was unconditionally released for Parton's new volume. 20

The collected work was honest journalism, though far below the standard Parton wished to maintain.²¹ The next year Parton edited *Eminent Women of the Age*,²² a "narrative of the lives and deeds of the most prominent women of the present generation." Parton's associates in the collection included Horace Greeley, who wrote of Margaret Fuller, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Fanny Fern. Grace Greenwood did the sketch of the editor's wife, though she was little qualified to perform this task, knowing neither the columnist herself nor anyone who did know her²³—an incredible assignment indeed. Parton contributed four sketches to the book. This volume being successful, a similar one was undertaken in 1870: Bayard Taylor, Charles A. Dana, Amos Kendall, and others contributed sketches which were put together by Parton in a volume called *Sketches of Men of Progress*.²⁴

Parton worked with a single purpose—that of buying future leisure. When Ticknor, the publisher, tried to cajole him into doing a series of short essays on historical events for Young Folks Magazine, Parton wrote that he preferred his editing task, which,

¹⁷ James Parton, Biographical Sketch of George W. Childs (Philadelphia Ledger imprint, 1867). For other printings see Parton bibliography.

¹⁸ Parton to Fields, Dec. 22, 1867 (Huntington Memorial Library).

¹⁹ James Parton, People's Book of Biography: or Short Lives of the Most Interesting Persons of All Ages and Countries (Hartford, 1868).

Robert Bonner to Parton, March 24, 1868 (Parton Collection).

²¹ Parton wrote Fields ten years later regarding some similar work: "The stuff they want is beneath you. You shall decide about that. I think only of the way and means of doing my Voltaire [a projected biography]: but for whom all that trash should burn" (Huntington Memorial Library).

²² James Parton (ed.), Eminent Women of the Age (Hartford, 1869).
²³ Grace Greenwood to Parton, March 25, 1869 (Parton Collection).

²⁴ James Parton (ed.), Sketches of Men of Progress (New York and Hartford, 1870-1871). This book was first published by subscription.

as he frankly stated, gave him "a chance of getting a quantity of

money."25

In 1871 there were three more Parton books. For the Hartford firm, which had published his *People's Book of Biography*, he gathered more material, some new, some previously printed, into a fat volume called *Triumphs of Enterprise*.²⁶ In an introduction to this work he wrote of his own successful excursion into the field of biography; other essays were accounts of contemporary figures in art, literature, and industry. That same year Ticknor and Fields published some of Parton's *Atlantic Monthly* essays, grouping them under the title *Topics of the Time*,²⁷ and also a slim book called *The Words of Washington*,²⁸ for which Parton had chosen small paragraphs and sentences from the first President's writings.

Not a few of Parton's admirers looked askance upon his lesser magazine work and the popular brochures. The public for whom he had written those simpler sketches was larger and less literary than the readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* or of his biographies, but he was convinced of the writer's duty to them. He realized the superiority of his biographies, but on occasion he questioned

if the humbler things did not fill a greater need.29

Parton's Life of Horace Greeley was reprinted in 1872 with eight added chapters, which made the book a good document for use in Greeley's presidential campaign. These additional sales also increased his income considerably. But the pressure of work weakened his vitality. No man could long stand the pace which he maintained in the latter half of the sixties. His income had reached its peak. Some years later, reviewing his struggle for financial independence, he stated:

An industrious writer, by the legitimate exercise of his calling—that is, never writing advertisements or trash for the sake of pay—can just exist—no more. By a compromise not dishonorable, though exasperating, he can average during his best years \$7000 or \$8000 a year. But no man should enter the literary life unless he has a fortune

²⁰ James Parton, Triumphs of Enterprise (Hartford, 1871).
²⁷ Parton, Topics of the Time (Boston, 1871).

²⁵ Parton to George Ticknor, Sept. 17, 1868 (MS Collection, Boston Public Library).

²⁸ James Parton (ed.), Words of Washington (Boston, 1871). The editor gained nothing from the sale of the first thousand copies; only after this limit had been reached did the usual 10 per cent reward his efforts.

²⁰ New England Magazine, N.S. VII, 3.

or can live contentedly on \$2000 a year. The best way is to make a fortune first, and write afterwards.36

All this hard work was done to buy time for writing a life of Voltaire, which he had begun as early as 1866 and projected long before. His great admiration for Voltaire was shared by very few of his compatriots. When Harriet Beecher Stowe heard of the project, she was horrified. Talking to Parton "over Sarah's shoulder," she wrote: "To bury yourself in such an author is like going into a cavern of mephitic gas. . . . I know you are going to reconstruct him and turn him out a tip-top saint and so I will have my turn of railing in advance."31

In 1868 the Parton family summered in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. There were delightful walks to the Bowl and climbs in the Berkshires. The outlying hills and the long tree-arched streets of the two villages, Stockbridge and Lenox, attracted literary notables from Boston, Cambridge, and New York, who in their turn spread abroad the delights of the region through books and poems.³² The town meant even more to Parton because of the friends it gave him, for here it was he met the Fields-Henry, David Dudley, and Cyrus—with whom his associations were to be close and lifelong. But to Fanny Fern the summer days were long and tedious. She was ill-fighting cancer with the same courage she had shown as a young woman in trials of a different nature.

Hoping that a greater change of scene and climate might aid recovery, the Partons spent the next summer at Newport, Rhode Island. The sea air strengthened Mrs. Parton, and she wrote of ten-mile tramps about the country-no small feat indeed for a woman of sixty-eight.33 The following year they went to Old Orchard, Maine, closer to Boston and less ostentatious than the Rhode Island seaside town. Now Parton's own health was affected by the pressure under which he had worked, and Fanny Fern's physical condition was even more grave than it had been two years before.

⁸⁰ Quoted in the Critic, XIX (N.S. XVI) (Oct. 24, 1891), 218.

³¹ Harriet Beecher Stowe to Mrs. Parton, Feb. 15 (no year) (Parton Collec-

tion).

32 R. Dewitt Mallary, Lenox and the Berkshire Highlands (New York, 1902),

³³ The summer vacation spots chosen by the Partons are easily noted through Parton's letters—he was continually urging his friends to visit them—and through Fanny Fern's Ledger columns.

VIII

Parton again considered ways of supplementing his income. Decision was difficult. On the one hand, General Butler suggested the Foreign Service, a popular means of support courted by literary men from Washington Irving to George Bancroft and James Russell Lowell; while on the other, James Redpath, organizer of the famous "Lyceum Bureau," pressed for Parton's services as a lecturer. The General plugged for the consulship:

Try your luck lecturing, and if you succeed, perhaps you won't want the consulship. Don't be too modest about the matter because you will be expected, if you get a good consulship, to write the history of Grant's administration—so prepare for it as you go along. . . .

I am glad to hear of your returning health, but still I advise you not to try to succeed as a lecturer. Remember you have had no train-

ing that way. . . . 34

Parton finally made up his mind to mount the platform. He had seriously considered the matter for a year but was held back by the fear of failure, though many friends, especially George W. Childs, had lent encouragement.35 When he returned to New York his decision had been made and his lecture, entitled "One Hundred Years Ago," written.

His first lecture tour extended from Kansas to Maine³⁶ under the management of Redpath's Lyceum Bureau, which had sought Parton's assent for three years.³⁷ Fanny Fern was her husband's faithful ally. Occasionally she accompanied him to some near-by engagement and once to Boston, where famous men and women congregated during the season at the Bureau office. Robert Collyer, one of the most successful speakers of his day, was introduced to Fanny Fern there. Shortly afterwards he turned to her and remarked in a clear voice which could be heard above the conversation filling the hall, "You've got a chest and ought to deliver your husband's lecture for him."38 However, she was content to have one lecturer in the family.

IX

The summer of 1871 the Partons returned to Newport. Society at the resort in these early days was composed of a brilliant

³⁴ B. F. Butler to Parton, Aug. 20, 1870 (Parton Collection). ³⁵ G. W. Childs to Parton, Aug. 1, 1870 (Parton Collection).
³⁶ Lyceum Magazine, I (June, 1871). "Circular II."
³⁷ Clipping (Parton Collection). Redpath quoted.

³⁸ Fanny Fern to Ellen W. Eldredge, n.d. (Parton Collection).

and cultured group of writers and professors from various cities and colleges. This group of intimate friends banded themselves together with the object of resisting "the rapid crescendo of the fast world which surrounded" them and marked the beginning of the famous Town and Country Club.39

It was possible, even at Newport, to live simply. Parton wrote to Henry B. Dawson: "We find it possible to live here without extravagance, and the climate is wonderfully restoring. I work hard and enjoy it. Board varies from fourteen to thirty dollars a week."40

Leisure hours were spent in joyful informality. There were innumerable picnics in the country or on the rocky cliffs overlooking the sea and jaunts to rural houses for "high tea." The company included such personalities as Bret Harte, Dr. J. G. Holland, Professors Goodwin and Lane of Harvard, Colonel T. W. Higginson and his wife, Julia Ward Howe and her family, with Helen Hunt and Kate Fields as frequent guests.

Every ten days the group would gather for an evening party at the home of one of its members to enjoy entertainment of their own making.⁴¹ A never-to-be-forgotten occasion was that of the mock commencement exercises held at the close of the summer in one of the houses on the Point. Julia Ward Howe wrote long afterwards of the "brilliant conjunction of stars" and "the delicious fooling" of that evening. 42 The room was jammed. Mrs. Howe, as college president, with Colonel Higginson as her aide, accompanied by important members of the "faculty" including Fanny Fern and James Parton, marched up the aisle with mock solemnity, wearing Oxford gowns and mortar boards. After the president had delivered her opening address in Latin, Greek, and English, the guests followed with amusement the orations listed on the Latin programs.⁴³ Number Four was a lecture entitled "Thesis Rhinosophica: Our noses and what to do with them," delivered by "Francisca Felix Parton, Jacobi Uxor," and toward the end of the program, a lecture was presented by "Jacobus Parton" entitled "Oratio Historioni: The Ideal New York Alderman."44

Julia Ward Howe, Reminiscences, 1819-1899 (Boston and New York, 1899), p. 405.

Parton to H. B. Dawson, n.d. Possession of the writer.

⁴¹ Florence Howe Hall, "Town and Country Club of Newport." Unidentified newspaper clipping (Parton Collection).

Howe, Reminiscences, p. 405.

Region of Newport Town and Country Club (Parton Collection).

⁴⁴ Howe, Reminiscences, p. 404.

X

The summer proved so delightful that the following season the Partons again returned to Newport. This time they rented a house instead of staying at the Quaker boardinghouse where they had lived the previous years. The months were to prove unhappy. Fanny Fern was dying, though she gave no intimation of this to her thousands of weekly readers or to her friends. For two years, with only intermittent relief, she had fought against the disease which slowly sapped her vitality.

In the agonizing final months of her life, Mrs. Parton was unable to lie down. Her only comfort was in resting against a specially built brace upon which she leaned. The Partons could no longer enjoy the gay and happy parties nor the tramps about the town. Fanny Fern's whole strength was utilized to write the columns for which her readers eagerly looked. She would not stop, and not once did she hint at the suffering which she bore continuously. Her humor never failed, as some last para-

graphs show, even when her body succumbed to pain.

When Fanny Fern grew worse, the Partons returned to New York. Robert Bonner insisted she give up her work temporarily. She would not consent to breaking her fourteen years of uninterrupted writing. At last, when she was herself unable to write except with the greatest pain, her husband took down the words as she slowly dictated them to him. It could not continue. Allowing her editor to insert a notice that her column would not appear for one week, she dropped her "Fern Leaves," as she was soon to know, forever. On October 31, 1872, the fight was over. The gallant woman whose keen eye had swept Broadway's world and whose quick sensing of the public's taste had enabled her to amuse and delight hosts of readers, left behind a memory as green as the name she had carried.

⁴⁵ Fanny Fern: Memorial Volume, p. 78.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE LECTURE PLATFORM

THE LYCEUM was a peculiarly American institution. Begun I in the decade before the Civil War, its programs attracted the city laborer and the farmer, the student and the prominent citizen alike. In his Life of Horace Greeley Parton had written of the Lyceum's influence: "Whether we regard it as a means of public instruction or as a means of making money, we cannot deny that it is an institution of great importance." The power of their reputation enabled many of the foremost writers of the period, such as Ik Marvel (Donald G. Mitchell), Parke Benjamin, and Bayard Taylor, for example, to gain on the lecture platform a fortune which their writings alone could not yield. In a short season of lecturing well-known authors piled up more money than they did in a long year of writing. Parton tried to explain this phenomenon. "Lecturing has been commenced as an antidote to the alleged docility of the press, and the alleged dullness of the pulpit. It may be. I praise it because it enables the man of letters to get partial payment from the public for the incalculable services which he renders the public."1

By the time Parton started out on his lecture tour, Redpath, reorganizing the lecture system, which had declined during the Civil War, had established his famous Bureau in Boston in 1867.² For a moderate fee speakers were saved the bother of arranging their own tours, and the circuit towns were assured of the talent they desired. Redpath's Lyceum, by offering not only lecturers but musical groups, ventriloquists, and stereopticon illustrated talks,³ attracted a much wider audience.⁴

II

Only after much correspondence and many questions relative to

Parton, Horace Greeley (1872 ed.), pp. 292-298.

² Lyceum Magazine, I (June, 1871). See published announcement of the

third annual list.

² Charles F. Horner, Life of James Redpath and the Development of the Modern Lyceum (New York, 1926), passim.

⁴ Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, Vol. VIII of A History of American Life, Schlesinger and Fox, eds. (New York, 1928), pp. 258-259.

possible tours did Parton's vacillating intentions come to a head. He wrote Redpath:

It has been, and is, my intention to place myself at your disposal for the season: and now the more, since it is certain I must stop writing

-all hard writing-for a good while. My lecture is done.

But there is a lion in the path. I have been struggling all this year with a chronic diarrhea: the attacks of which weaken me horribly. I have had the hope that knocking about the country would help and restore me, and I still cling to it. For five weeks I have bathed every day, gained much, wrote my lecture, and felt a longing to begin. But I have had another relapse from catching cold, which throws an agonizing doubt over the picture.

Very likely, as the weather cools, I may rise superior—and get very

strong. But I may not.

This I can say: I have given up a most inviting task for the Atlantic, from mere lack of strength to perform it, and I wish to devote all the strength I shall have next winter to lecturing. I should like to go to Kansas. I will go if I can. I will go wherever you send me, if I can. I wish to be wholly yours.⁵

Up to this time, Parton, as we have seen, had been living entirely by his pen—a precarious career in those days, when most writers, in England as well as America, derived their income mainly from inherited wealth or else supplemented their literary income by lecturing or other means.⁶ Parton's earning capacity of seven or eight thousand a year was unsurpassed by any American writer up to this time,⁷ but what he had been able to lay aside was not enough to tide him over the long period of inactivity which he so greatly needed. So James Parton, biographer and journalist, ranking in the forefront of his profession, followed the trail blazed by Bayard Taylor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Horace Greeley. He had no oratorical tricks with which to court his audience. Yet the lecture "One Hundred Years Ago," presented that first season in country churches, school houses, and finally in the larger halls of Eastern cities, proved popular.

The subject matter of this lecture was obvious but appealing. Parton made of America's growth an absorbing saga; he told of the people's struggles against adversity, of their eventual development into a great industrial nation.⁸ He had an easy manner and

⁶ Parton to James Redpath, Aug. 24, 1870. Possession of the writer.

^o Parton to William Dean Howells, Aug. 6, 1885 (MS Collection, Harvard University).

⁷ Critic, XIX (Oct. 24, 1891), 218.

⁸ Manuscript, "One Hundred Years Ago" (Parton Collection).

a pleasing if not forceful voice. Everywhere he won favor, and frequently his initial appearance was followed by an urgent request for "next season" before he left the lecture room.9 Parton gained as much as he gave: to meet the people for whom he had so long written and get their personal reactions as he spoke proved a remarkable stimulus. He learned, too, that writing for the lecture platform was a very different matter from writing for publication.

Experience led him to champion the Lyceum against its critics, and he urged the New York Times not to undervalue it as a means of "popular instruction and amusement." He wrote: "You would not be ill-pleased to come once a week into a bright, well-lighted hall, filled with neighbors and friends, and listen to an hour's lecture upon some topic of general interest. . . . No agency is to be despised that lures people from torpor, gossip, and sensuality."10

At times the audiences were as much interested in the speaker himself as they were in what he had to say. The Boston Advertiser gave a complete account of Parton's first lecture in that city:

In person he is rather tall, decidedly slender, and very dark-complexioned. His hair is thick and black and so are his whiskers. He has large and prominent features and a sober expression of countenance, to which a twinkle in his eyes, when they can be seen through his eyeglasses, gives an occasional contradiction. His voice is thin and high, but quite pleasant; and his delivery, though slow and monotonous, has a peculiar and somewhat indefinable charm, which makes it almost impossible not to listen when he speaks. The discourse in its subject matter, may be best described as characteristic. It was of a very light and insubstantial texture, to say the least, put together without any plan or method in its progress. Its learning was not profound, but it showed the wide range of an intelligent and omnivorous reader. Very little, almost nothing indeed, in the way of original thought was attempted; but a great deal of freshness was displayed in the expression of ideas which are not unfamiliar. And here, we reach the secret of Mr. Parton's success, both as a speaker and author. He may be at times unsound, illogical, and flippant, but he is never dull. There is a sort of easy animation, a wide awake, alert, self-controlled vivacity in his style which is almost impossible to resist.11

⁸ Lyceum Magazine, II (June, 1872). Press excerpts on Parton's first lec-

ture season.

10 Lyceum Magazine, I (June, 1871), 21. Letter from Parton to New York

Boston Advertiser, Dec. 15, 1870, as quoted in the Lyceum Magazine, I (June, 1871), 27.

Every report was enthusiastic and appreciative. The Titusville (Pennsylvania) Herald commented:

Mr. Parton's delivery has its faults. His voice is rather monotonous; there is not sufficient modulation. . . . But who thinks of Emerson's manner, the outlandishness of his gestures, or the gyrations of his legs? But Mr. Parton's manner is very easy, his voice is pleasant in tone. 12

Parton's first appearance in his home town was made a gala occasion.13 The hall was filled, and his fellow New Yorkers showed as much enthusiasm as Bostonians were wont to show when one of their fellow townsmen achieved nationwide fame.

If the audiences were taking stock of the lecturer, he in turn was sizing them up. He gave his fellow-speakers whom he met in the home office of the Lecture Bureau in Boston "a ludicruous account of his experience in the lecture room, protesting that every audience has as marked a characteristic as an individual." Parton confessed "... it is glorious to meet the people face to face in this way; but while I am waiting the summons to go to the hall I feel like a criminal expecting the sheriff to open the door of his cell, rope in hand, and conduct him to the scaffold."14

The long trips to the hinterland were tiring indeed. His family observed him on his homecomings as "white about the gills, with a muddy valise and a mousy horror of a travelling blanket ... and with an insane desire to indulge in a Rip Van Winkle nap, and dodge his kind."15 Exhausting as it was, there were personal compensations big enough to make Parton follow the circuit for

many years.

By January, 1871, plans were already under discussion for the ensuing season. More sophisticated fare was arranged for Eastern cities. Redpath had several ideas. One was that Parton should share the platform in Philadelphia with a Congressman and debate with him the justice of the charges made against Congress in Parton's Atlantic Monthly article. Another was that Parton give a series of historical lectures to be delivered in the colleges of the country. He refused both suggestions.16

¹⁶ Fanny Fern, Capersauce (New York, 1868), p. 280.

¹² Titusville Herald, Jan. 27, 1871. 13 New York Tribune, Feb. 10, 1871. 14 Every Saturday, Jan. 28, 1871.

¹⁶ Parton to James Redpath, Jan. 28, 1871. Possession of the writer.

"Twenty-two hours on the Erie R. R. without food," he wrote in one letter, ¹⁷ but the weariness of the long stretches was not his only complaint—he regretted having to waste hours that he might have been spending at his desk. He wrote Redpath his annoyance:

You were justified in sending me to Kalamazoo, Michigan; but I am filling the engagement at great loss to myself—pecuniary and others. It is a fearful journey.

For the future, perhaps, we had better have this rule: i.e. receive \$300—then go ahead and make the appointments. If not, not. This, of course, does not include Pittsburg [sic], or anything you may have done up to the receipt of this note.

I left work by which I gained \$48 a day, to come here. It was not your fault, but mine, and perhaps may turn out for the best. I

had a good time at Fulton.18

The three new lectures were "Who Are the Vulgar?" "Beaumarchais, Dramatist of the French Revolution," and "The Pilgrim Fathers as Men of Business." "The Pilgrim Fathers as Men of Business" was the most popular of the three new lectures, with "Who Are the Vulgar?" a nice essay on simplicity and good taste as opposed to cheap ostentation, next in demand. The lectures went over well. The weak voice, Parton's greatest hindrance on the platform, strengthened; the lessons learned in the first season benefited him. "I seem to be improving a little," he wrote, "in my power to interest an audience: but after all, I shall never be a Demosthenes." 20

One new lecture was added in 1873. Parton had at first suggested one on "Our Faults," which Redpath did not consider an auspicious topic. In its stead the lecturer proposed "Our Kings of Business," which proved both timely and popular. This lecture was made up of "all sorts of gossip, reflection, anecdote, about such 'kings' as Stewart, Jay Cooke, Girard, Astor, Vanderbilt—their power, errors, duties, etc., . . ."²¹ The essay was read throughout the country in 1873, 1874, and for several years following. Reviewing successively the "Kings of Business," Parton noted that each had learned one thing superlatively well.

Humorously including himself among the "kings," Parton

18 Ibid. Possession of the writer.

¹⁷ Idem to idem, Feb. 19, 1871. Possession of the writer.

Lyceum Magazine, I (June, 1871), 25. "Circular II."

²⁰ Parton to James Redpath, Jan. 25, 1872 (MS Collection, Harvard University).

²¹ MS and outline, "Kings of Business" (Parton Collection).

told his hearers that a weakness for books caused him to invest the first two dollars he ever made in a volume of Shakespeare. Always tempted to make some purchase when he passed a bookshop, he soon formed the habit of leaving his money at home, but realizing that this was "cowardly, running away from the enemy," he reversed his habit and though he might look longingly into the shop window, he could "stalk away with a proud conscience."

IV

In 1873 Parton assisted Thomas Nast in the preparation of the one lecture that artist was to give. In 1867 Nast, then on his rapid rise to fame, had suggested to a little known and unrecognized humorist, Mark Twain, that they arrange a lecture together. Nast was to supply the illustrations, with quick changes, while Mark Twain talked. When the writer declined, Nast gave up the plan of appearing on the platform.²² Redpath was now bent on adding the cartoonist to his list of celebrities. He managed to sail for Europe on the same ship with Nast—and by the time the voyage was over, the contract was signed.²³

The Bureau presented this famous man in an illustrated narrative on "American Humor." James Parton was Nast's natural choice as writer of the lecture script. Parton knew the gifts, personal and artistic, that Nast possessed. The cartoonist visited Parton in Newburyport, Massachusetts, where he was spending the summer, and there the scheme took shape.²⁴ In September, Parton reported to Redpath: "He will succeed. At first, I feared

for him: but I now have great hopes of him."25

Nast's first lecture in Peabody, Massachusetts, was the forerunner of some hundred-odd successful appearances, pleasing to everyone but the artist. The first lectures were the hardest, and his wife wrote her cousin James of the strain Nast endured:

He begged Redpath to let him off, he offered him money even, but no use. Redpath insisted that unless he or I, or one of his children get sick, he must go through with it! He sent me the first of his blood money as he calls it....

He says he feels like a travelling circus, and it is all a horrible dream, he only wishes he could wake up and find himself home.²⁶

23 Horner, Life of James Redpath, p. 175.

²⁴ E. W. Eldredge to Robert Bonner, Aug. 28, 1873 (MS Division, New York Public Library).

²² Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain: A Biography (New York, 1935), I, 321-322.

²⁵ Parton to James Redpath, Sept. 10, 1873. Possession of the writer. ²⁶ Sallie Edwards Nast to Parton, Oct. 10, 1873 (Parton Collection).



From Nevins's Emergence of Modern America. Harper's Weekly presents Celebrities of the Platform James Parton in upper row with pen and scroll



One season was enough, though Nast was well compensated for his misery.²⁷ Even a tempting suggestion from Mark Twain, an echo of Nast's earlier offer, was refused. Nothing could lure him again to the platform.²⁸

V

The death of Parton's wife in 1872 changed his whole life, making him freer than ever before. This was evident in his plans for the season of 1873. He wrote Pond and Redpath: "I mean to have urgent work, but make my lecturing tours long, slow, and recreative. Send me as far as you like—only give me

plenty of time to get there."29

Traveling about the country was difficult. The long hours, the strange places, and the uncomfortable railway trains added to the hardships. There were rewards in the way of human contacts, however, as well as financial ones. Little mistakes crept in upon well-arranged schedules, but readjustments were cheerfully made. Once as a result of his own miscopying of a date, Parton arrived at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on the day after the one on which he was to have lectured. The author and the committee scurried around and made new arrangements. It all turned out so pleasantly that he could joke about it to the Bureau: "My mistake cost me \$200. Serves me right. I took all the blame, for all of it was mine."

Everywhere Parton went, he observed his surroundings with a keen eye. He wrote home once a week—letters both informative and cheering. Sometimes these were allusions to things nearer home. In Zanesville, Ohio,³¹ the author found "the original and only Sam Sharpley's Minstrels," which the family of three had seen in Newburyport the summer before. Many sights made him think of the Massachusetts town, for example: "I am also reminded of Mrs. Allen's hair restorer and Wizard Oil on every side. How pleasing to the patriotic mind of a lone way-farer!" Early in December he wrote from Chicago:

All this week past I have been on the move.... How wonderful the growth of this country! Mankato, where I lectured the next night after Indianapolis, was the scene, only 10 years ago, of an awful massacre by the Sioux Indians. Three thousand people were killed—men,

28 Paine, Mark Twain, II, 611-612.

²⁷ Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, p. 259.

²⁶ Parton to James Redpath, May 9, 1873. Possession of the writer. ³⁰ Idem to idem, Feb. 18, 1873.

Parton to Ethel Thomson, Nov. 31 [sic], 1873 (Parton Collection).

women, and children. Thirty-nine of the murderers were hung at Mankato, and buried in a hole not 200 yards from where I lectured. Yet, now it is a large town with a great State Normal School, and lectures, and a large hotel.³²

VI

A trip through the West in 1874 resulted in "a remarkably nice time." "All is smiling prosperity west of the Mississippi," Parton observed. "There will be plenty of lecturing in the West next year if Pork and Grain keep up."33 The next year he made his first appearance in Chicago. The title of his lecture, which was delivered in the Grand Opera House before a capacity audience, was "Our Scandalous Politics." The subject was one on which he had spoken out boldly in his Atlantic article of nearly ten years before. It was particularly timely now, since the panic of 1873 had further ripped open the ugly machinations of many political groups. As usual there was no mincing of words. The nation, Parton asserted, was in the hands of a "scalawag regency," who filled the public offices with rogues whom the legislatures, already dominated by corrupt influence, were powerless to control. Parton presented his own remedy: "Female suffrage and the disfranchisement of ignorance, a restriction of the right of naturalization, and better salaries for our public men as an incentive for the capable to fill them." Bad as the evils were, he considered that ours was "the best government of all," and he was confident we should eventually achieve an efficient and honest administration of the republic.34

VII

The strain of adjusting his life to new conditions was considerable. Six lectures were too many to memorize for a man whose gifts lay in writing rather than in declamation; yet Redpath begged him to put aside his manuscript when he reached the platform. He promised to reintroduce Parton in the autumn to Boston audiences that had shown increasing coolness to any speakers but their own fellow townsmen. Before Parton next came to that city, Redpath dropped his lecturer a short note of encouragement and caution: "Now, if you read your lecture you

24 Chicago Times, Jan. 18, 1875.

³² Parton to Ellen W. Eldredge and Ethel Thomson, Dec. 7, 1873 (Parton Collection).

⁸³ Parton to James Redpath, Jan. 1, 1874 (MS Collection, Harvard University).

cannot be heard in every part of the hall. . . . Please commit. Do."35

Meanwhile, fashions in public entertainment were changing; no longer could a mere speaker easily find an audience. Redpath sold his share in the Bureau in 1875,³⁶ when the signs of change in what the public wanted first became clearly discernible. Some years later he gave an interview to the Boston *Globe* about his association with Parton:

Parton's first year was a decided success, for he delivered his lecture: but when he read his second lecture he lost ground. I believe he has since recovered his hold on the Lyceum. . . . He is one of the few men who ought to deliver courses of lectures. Then he would get his own select audiences—not the miscellaneous audiences of the regular Lyceum—and he would soon be in constant demand. He is one of the half dozen lecturers whom I would go and listen to every night for a month running.³⁷

Parton followed the wise counsel of Redpath, and it became the exception rather than the rule for him to take his manuscript with him. Meanwhile, always in the background there was the studious preparation and literary skill which made for good writing. At least two of the lectures, "Kings of Business" and "The Pilgrim Fathers as Men of Business" were later published in the New York *Tribune* in what it called its lecture sheet.

VIII

The lectures that Parton gave in the following years were on various subjects. There were such topics as "Our Set," "The Fun of Our Forefathers," and "Young Men." All were in lighter vein, but in each there was a strain of genuine sensibility and a bit of raillery against something that was false or pretentious. Perhaps the most notable later development was Parton's increasingly reflective mood. Some lectures were historical, as the one on "Jefferson and Hamilton" or "The Friendship between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison." There was one on Victor Hugo into which Parton put a great deal of his own philosophy of life. He admired Hugo as a man standing "there in France for Liberty, Light, Justice, Confederation, and Peace; for the family and simple living; for the sacredness of childhood and the dignity of

²⁵ James Redpath to Parton, Nov. 11, 1874 (Parton Collection).

³⁶ Horner, *Life of Redpath*, p. 278.

³⁷ Boston *Globe*, clipping (1880?) (Parton Collection).

³⁸ Lectures in manuscript (Parton Collection).

woman; for the amelioration of the human lot, by means not violent, by love and compassion, and the methods which these inspire." Again, speaking on "All Things in Common," Parton scoffed at old dreams of "co-operatives" which "can never put an end to competition"; he felt that the people should grasp the means of co-operation that were already at hand—such means, for example, as local government afforded.⁴⁰

In his lecture on "The Education That Does not Educate," Parton warned that young people too often were merely recipients of what was handed to them—no effort was made to develop their individuality. He was convinced rightly enough that a change in the conventional type of instruction was near at hand. In "Republican Nobility" he acknowledged that work was necessary, but it was no less necessary that the workers should learn to utilize their leisure. "The nobility of America," he declared, "has forgotten how to live. The next business of America is to get an improved nobility, and supply every member of it, in some suitable and honorable manner, with a secretary, a horse, a holiday, and a reward."

That Parton continued to be a popular lecturer long after the heyday of the lecture circuit had passed is ample proof that he had much to give, both in pleasure and in enlightenment, to those who flocked to hear him.

^{39 &}quot;Victor Hugo," MS dated Sept., 1885 (Parton Collection).
40 "All Things in Common," MS (Parton Collection).

⁴¹ "The Education That Does not Educate," MS (Parton Collection).
⁴² "Republican Nobility," MS (Parton Collection).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PARTON IN THE LION'S DEN

SAD MONTHS followed the death of Fanny Fern, and even darker prospects loomed, for Mrs. Parton's daughter, Ellen Eldredge, now planned to move from New York with her niece Ethel to give the growing child the greater freedom of a small town.

Years before when sailing with General Butler on his famous yacht America, Parton with other guests had gone ashore to escape a three days' calm. On that occasion he discovered Newburyport, Massachusetts, lying snugly near the mouth of the Merrimac.¹ The town had charmed Parton; he remembered it now, and it seemed the ideal solution to the family problem. He discussed the matter with Miss Eldredge and Robert Bonner, their faithful friend and coexecutor of the columnist's estate.² Harriet Prescott Spofford, a talented daughter of Newburyport, known to both the Partons, was consulted. Mrs. Spofford urged Miss Eldredge to become a resident of the town³ and asked her sister to forward details on possible homes and schools which she herself, a part-time resident of Washington, did not know. Newburyport was quickly decided upon.

Early in February, 1873, the trio alighted from the train to find the Massachusetts town lying cold and cheerless under its

winter mantle of snow.

II

Newburyport had passed the zenith of its busy career. Ships no longer lay at anchor; the great shipyards had fallen into disuse. Factories had usurped the place of maritime industries, but the town still had much of its old charm. Neatly clapboarded houses stood on tree-lined streets leading from the Merrimac, and above them rose the slender spires of old meeting houses. At the crest of the hill, above the river stretched the long High Street. Here on either side were built the handsome homes of the more pros-

² Parton Family accounts.

Boston Herald. Interview with James Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).

³ Letter from Harriet Prescott Spofford, n.d. (Parton Collection). Other letters dated and undated from Mrs. Spofford in the spring of 1873.

perous inhabitants, many topped with "captain's walks" or cupolas from which one might watch the sailing in and out of cargo ships. The town had historic traditions; famous men had been its citizens, and Caleb Cushing, the diplomat, still lived as the first gentleman of the town.⁴

Miss Eldredge left New York with a sense of relief. Parton's relatives had always been cool to his wife, and their disapproval had not been buried with her. The daughter was deeply devoted to her brilliant mother, and this criticism, together with the recollection of the Partons' early marital disagreements, added estrangement to the grief which followed her mother's death. Former coolness had dissolved in sympathy as husband and daughter together cared for Fanny Fern in her illness, but early memories were not completely erased. Events of small moment continued to strain her relations with Parton. The breach might have widened had not Effie, the eleven-year-old child, unconsciously drawn the bereaved husband and daughter closer together—resentment could not long continue in the face of Parton's ingratiating and affectionate consideration.

Parton called on Miss Jane Andrews, who took a few pupils, and arranged for lessons for Ethel. Everything possible was contrived to bring sunshine into the two drab rooms depressingly papered in sickly green at Tilton's boardinghouse. The pictures Miss Eldredge had brought were left unhung—they were too out of keeping with any available background, but Parton brought pots of flowers in an effort to add cheer to the sitting room. When the time came for him to leave, courageous spirits drooped.⁵ They felt mixed emotions as they realized that the family was to be permanently separated. The summer months, which were to

reunite the little family, seemed far away indeed.

III

New York was a lonely place for Parton on his return. The Eighteenth Street house was rented,⁶ and he moved far uptown to rooms in a house on Third Avenue in the Seventies. A downtown office made possible the delight of living away from the noise and confusion of the business districts, and the houses crowded row on row. In one of his weekly letters to Newbury-

⁴ Currier, Ould Newbury, passim.

⁶ Ellen Eldredge to Robert Bonner, n.d. (Bonner Collection, MS Division, New York Public Library). ⁶ Parton Family Papers.

port, he described his new quarters as the nicest he had ever known and located in the best of neighborhoods. From his windows he could see Blackwells Island in the East River and the country stretching far beyond. Hundreds of sails dotted the river's surface, and the fields and vacant lots on all sides of the house seemed to belie the fact that he was actually in the city. He loved to walk, and the three miles to his mid-city workroom were no hardship, while Central Park close by proved a daily pleasure.

For several years his wife's illness and retirement from activity had kept Parton close to his own fireside, and he had foregone the congenial gatherings of many delightful hostesses. But Parton loved people. With more than usual pleasure he now accepted invitations; he delighted in meeting again the interesting men and women from whose company he had long absented himself. His lecture tours took him far afield, but on his return he was certain to find cards and invitations crowding each other. Parton's gift for conversation was well known, and he took his place naturally in the intellectual society of the city.

IV

In the decade of the seventies many women of prominence held conversazioni. Most famous of these was that of Mrs. Vincenzo Botta, the former Anne Lynch, whose husband was a distinguished Dante scholar. Since the forties when Edgar Allan Poe and Fitz-Greene Halleck were counted among her guests, Mrs. Botta's drawing room attracted the most distinguished American and foreign celebrities. Mrs. John Cleveland, Horace Greeley's sister, also entertained notable persons at her home, where her daughters Margaret and Pauline assisted her and frequently added their musical talents to the occasion. To Every Tuesday afternoon in Lent, Parton's old friend, Ida Greeley,

⁷ Parton to Ellen Eldredge and Ethel Thomson, May 11, 1873 (Parton Collection). Hereinafter all such letters will be simply listed as family letters. They are the sources for Parton's activities in New York except where otherwise noted. Most of these were undated, though they were almost always written on Sundays. They included usually a running narrative and at the end a group of notes headed "items."

^{*} Family letters, n.d.

⁹ James Lauren Ford, Forty Odd Years in the Literary Workshop (New York, 1921), p. 60. See also a description of these salons in Hervey Allen's Israfel (New York, 1927), I, 677-680.

¹⁰ The Greeley Birthday Reception. Sketch of the celebration in honor of the 61st birthday of Horace Greeley. (New York, printed, not published, 1872), p. 28.

entertained her guests with recitations and professional singers.¹¹ At some of the many parties Parton attended, whist was played, but for the most part there was no music, card playing, or dancing. Good talk was sufficient to draw the gifted to the home of Mrs. Botta, or that of Mrs. E. D. Youmans—though Youmans himself, the scientist, often sought refuge at the Century Club.¹² Mary Booth, editor of Harper's Bazaar, was another prominent hostess; her friends included the most sparkling wits of the town. Parton's Sunday letters to Newburyport reveal that he was a frequent guest of all these hostesses.

Probably his favorite receptions were those of the singularly gifted and charming Mrs. Henry Field, who attracted the leading members of New York society to her parlors. Both the Fields were his particular friends. In 1873 Henry Field wrote him from New York after finding the writer had gone up to Newburyport. He had come down, he said, "from Stockbridge on Monday commanded by my sovereign lady to seize the person of one James Parton and bring him forthwith to the Berkshire Hills. You must be tired of the flat seaboard by this time." The following winter the antics of a pet monkey kept by Mrs. Field made good copy for little Ethel in Newburyport, who was told about the dress it wore and its special diet of whiskey and milk to withstand the climate.

Parton went to the Fields', the Youmanses', and Mrs. David Croly's (Jenny June) with unfailing regularity. One evening Mrs. Youmans held a reception which was attended by Mrs. Henry Field, George Ripley, Kate Field, Whitelaw Reid, John Hay, William Cullen Bryant and others. Parton, who was one of the guests, collected tidbits of gossip for his next family letter:

Mrs. Crosby is growing very fat. Most splendidly dressed was Mrs. Holland, the wife of Timothy Titcomb. . . . It was an extremely agreeable party, because none of the people were stuck up, or tried to show off. Old Mr. Bryant at 80 was as fresh and gay as the youngest person, and told me he was a sickly boy and not a robust young man. ¹⁶

12 Holt, Sixty Years a Publisher, pp. 120-121.

14 Henry Field to Parton, Aug. 6, 1873 (Parton Collection).

¹¹ Note, Ida Greeley to James Parton, Feb. 26, 1874: "Music and singing and a number of pleasant people." Mentioned also in a family letter. Other notes without date (Parton Collection).

¹³ Ford, op. cit., p. 37. Mrs. Field's background was fictionalized in the novel All This, and Heaven Too (New York, 1938), by Rachel Field.

¹⁶ Mentioned regularly throughout the winters 1873-1875 in family letters.

¹⁶ Family letter, Feb. 24, 1874.

These frequent assemblies provided relaxation from the welter of work which piled upon Parton's desk. He could not fill all the demand upon him. He wrote the much-loved child in Newburyport, "You have no idea, darling, what a run there is upon me this fall. I had to decline five invitations to write things last week. I wish I could take a journeyman, or else two or three little apprentices. You should be one..."

Parton was popular as an after-dinner speaker. On one occasion he addressed the Lotus Club. Charles Kingsley, the English author, was present, and Parton afterwards recounted the writer's traits to his niece, describing his elegant figure and telling of the stammer which affected his speech in private conversation but not in lectures. Parton's address before the Club was made under difficulty with some "mistakes agonizing"; apparently it proved satisfactory to his listeners, for he wrote: "I was rewarded by some real rewards of laughter. People, you know, laugh very easily when they have had a good bit of champagne for dinner." 18

New Year's Day always presented a heavy social routine to New York gentlemen. On the first of January, 1875, Parton closed his desk after a short morning of work. With a list of names of some two dozen chosen friends, he set out upon his round of calls. He reported he "walked hard and worked hard" on his list until ten in the evening with only one interval between visits. With over a dozen hostesses called upon, he gave up, being too fatigued to go farther. Distances in New York were already proving too great for convenience. As Parton went from house to house, he must have recalled similar occasions when Fanny Fern was deluged by hundreds of strangers who swarmed down Eighteenth Street out of curiosity. Now himself an eligible celebrity, he felt duty bound to leave his cards of respect.

¹⁷ Family letter, Nov. 9, 1874.

¹⁸ Family letter, n.d. In a family letter of March 10, 1874, he reported going with a party of friends, which included Mrs. Botta and Kingsley and his daughter, to Robert Bonner's, where they inspected Bonner's prize horse, Dexter.

Those called upon were Mrs. Henry Field, Mrs. Youmans, Mrs. Groot, Mrs. Cleveland, Mrs. Daly, Mrs. N. P. Willis, Miss Booth, Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Croly, Mrs. Parker, Mrs. Welling, and Mrs. Holland. Those he was obliged to omit from his rounds were Mrs. Pemberton, Mrs. Charlier, Mrs. Bonner, Miss White, Kate Field, Imogen Willis, Mrs. Bumstead, Mrs. Crosby, Mrs. Botta, and two others. All this was related in a family letter. He had, indeed, done well. The inclusion of Mrs. N. P. Willis is interesting. Her name and that of Imogen would seem to imply the breach between Fanny Fern and her family had been healed.

²⁰ Clipping from Youth's Companion [undated], "New Year's Day in New York" (Parton Collection).

V

Parton had many cherished friends. All the Fields—David Dudley, Cyrus, and Henry—were familiars, and he spent many hours in their company. One evening when he dined at the David Dudley Fields', Bret Harte was a fellow guest. Parton reported that he showed "a good deal of robust sense and a slight tendency to dwell upon the unpleasing side of people's characters and doings. But he was very agreeable on that occasion and always when I have met him. . . ."²¹

Parton maintained contact with the friends he had once shared with Fanny Fern. The Wellings, family favorites, were frequently visited; a New Year's call on them was followed by a faithful transmission of greetings and also a description of Mrs. Welling's dress.²² Professor Elie Charlier and Mrs. Charlier, proprietors of a well-known boys' school, likewise were valued friends. In 1875 Professor Charlier opened his new building at Fifty-ninth Street and Central Park, which Parton considered "the most elegant and complete school building in the world."²³

Chief Justice Charles Patrick Daly, of the New York County Supreme Court, often was host to the writer. Love of the theater, which never diminished for Parton, and recollections of old and unfashionable New York, common to them both, served to preserve fast friendship. Paul Du Chaillu, the Arctic and African explorer, was present at a dinner Parton attended at the Dalys'. He was the first lecturer Ethel had heard, and to her delight he had made much of her afterwards. There was chatter about Du Chaillu in the letters, and an account of talk of the Lapps, whom the explorer more recently had been studying. At the Daly table that same evening was a Lieutenant Collins, soon leaving for Panama to see "about cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Darien."24 The winter season pyramided with social activity. "I am too dissipated . . . ," he wrote; "I lectured with fire and fury on Friday evening, dined with Dudley Field on Saturday, went to the Century Club Reception afterward, visited a Convent Sunday afternoon, and am going to Mrs. Croly's this evening."25 But as the winter came to an end, it brought the happy realization

²¹ Family letter, Nov. 22, 1874.

²² Family letter, Jan. 3, 1875. The Wellings are not identified. They were probably old neighbors.

²³ Family letter, June 23, 1875. For the Institute, see (Prospectus) French and English Institution for Young Gentlemen under the Direction of Prof. Elie Charlier (New York, 1869), passim.

that he would soon be living permanently with the family in Newburyport. A house was being bought there;²⁶ the quiet of semiretirement with the child he loved so dearly was delightful to contemplate.

Ethel, now a twelve-year-old, was always in his thoughts. He wished her to be as nearly perfect as careful training could make

her. To that end he saluted her with the following.

Form of Self-Examination for a Girl 12 years old

1. Am I more resigned to my sewing than I was a year ago?

2. Do I do it better?

3. Am I more helpful to my aunt than I was?

4. Am I less a dwaddle (dawdler) than I used to be?
5. Can I put my stockings on without pausing to meditate?

6. Am I always quite as respectful in manner to Miss Andrews as I ought to be to so good a teacher and so admirable a lady?

7. Can I say, "sir," to Mr. Caleb Cushing?

8. Do I rub my side teeth any harder?

9. Are my nails, generally, in better condition?

10. Am I more attentive to the wishes and feeling of others?

II. How do I behave when my vanity does not help me—when there is no one to make me ashamed?²⁷

VI

In the absence of his own household, Parton had drawn closer to those relatives whom he had missed in later years. He now visited the Nasts in Morristown, New Jersey. In New York he attended more frequently than he had for many years the family gatherings of the Haneys, Jesse Haney having married one of the talented Edwards sisters. For a short time he lived at Haney's house, and he was always present at holiday feasts. The children loved him and climbed over him affectionately.²⁸ When a new baby was born, they called him James Parton Haney after the famous cousin. These youngsters at their play vividly recalled the child who had brightened the home in Eighteenth Street, and he wrote:

Jimmy Haney is playing on the floor with his Christmas train of cars. Kitty is in another corner with heaps of blocks and new toys. The baby, who is now in the crawling stage of development, is going round the floor spoiling their arrangements, and giving forth exultant cries. As for me, I am writing in my lap. . . .

²⁶ Family letter, Feb., 1875.

²⁷ Letter to Ethel Thomson (Parton), Nov. 29, 1874 (Parton Collection).
²⁸ Miss Kate Haney to the writer, July 8, 1939.

He thanked the Newburyport family for their Christmas gifts, chief among them the

pair of elegant sleeve buttons, which I have constantly worn ever since—to the solace and admiration of a distinguished circle of this metropolis, including the audience at the opera house. The whole orchestra began to play at my entrance, even before I had on my gloves. . . . 29

Relatives in New York were to begrudge his removal when he made it. They were attached to this cousin who had again acquired the habit of dropping in upon their festive gatherings just as he had done before any of them, Parton, Nast, or Haney, had begun to climb the ladder leading to success.

VII

New York continued to offer kaleidoscopic entertainment. The streets and theaters were crammed with excitement. In 1873 Barnum put his World's Fair under canvas at Madison Square.³⁰ Barnum's inaugural procession passed the author's windows, and he enjoyed the parade, which included four velvet-clad elephants and a gay monkey tumbling over the back of one of them.³¹

The opera was first in Parton's catalogue of pleasures. He delighted in the great works first presented in the early seventies. In 1873 Aida was sung, and he declared it Verdi's masterpiece, if not as stirring as Il Trovatore or Ernani. The house was packed and many stood. But of them all none was to surpass Lohengrin in his estimation.

There has been of late but one topic of conversation in this city. "Lohengrin"—the new opera by Wagner. House filled to the ceiling! I have heard it once and thought it the most noble and beautiful entertainment I ever saw presented to an audience. The story is a romantic legend of the oldentime when there were knights and fairies and enchantments, and all such things. The music is wavy, dreamy, delightful, beyond description. The only fault is that it lasts four hours, and tires me to death.³²

VIII

Parton, fatigued by the writing he had forced upon himself in previous years, spent the winter turning out an occasional column for the New York *Ledger* and studying his mass of Voltaire

Family letter, Jan. 3, 1875.

So Family letter, Oct. 19, 1873.

Family letter, same date.

³² Family letter (1874). This was not the opera's first presentation in the city, but the first performance given in the Academy of Music.



ETHEL PARTON ABOUT 1868



material. He also enjoyed his role as lecturer. But a year of decreased activity proved too long. The Atlantic Monthly called once more, and Parton, responding with alacrity, began his serialized life of Thomas Jefferson.

Parton also edited a memorial volume of his wife's writingsselections from her novels and columns.³³ He prefaced the work with a hundred-page biographical sketch, which while done with warm feeling and a way that pleased her countles admirers, was at the same time free from inordinate praise. The panic caused a delay in publication,³⁴ but the volume appeared in time for the 1873 Christmas trade. Whether because of the hard times or of a decline of interest in the once popular writer, the book sold slowly. Four hundred dollars was paid as a first royalty, and this sum was promptly deposited to the account of the little granddaughter. "But for the panic," Parton wrote to Bonner, "it would have been a thousand dollars. But the book has sold 600 copies since New Year's, and I hope it will continue to sell."35

The winter of 1875 was the last Parton spent in New York. The hope that his earnings might reach the point where he could lighten his schedule and turn to more personal interests was always cherished. In 1870 and 1871 he had feared that he might not reap his reward. When at the close of Grant's second presidential campaign Thomas Nast had grown despondent and weary with the fight he had maintained in Harper's Weekly against the President, Parton wrote urging him to take time for a well-deserved rest: "You can rest, and I can't. You have considerable property and I have none. I must plod on, but not nearly so hard now as before. The time is near, I hope, when I can let up on myself. . . . "36

Parton's opportunity came at the beginning of 1875. He was happy indeed with the prospect of more leisurely days to come and a family reunion in Newburyport. It was the return from two books—The Life of Jefferson and A History of Caricature and above all the nice profit derived from his lecture engagements which made this finally possible.

³⁸ Fanny Fern: Memorial Volume as previously noted.

⁸⁴ Family letter, Nov. 1, 1873. ⁸⁵ Parton to Robert Bonner, May 23, 1874 (Bonner Collection, MS Division, New York Public Library).

Quoted in Paine, Th. Nast, His Period and His Pictures, p. 266.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CRITICAL BARBS

IS STRENGTH RENEWED after a summer of comparative relaxation, Parton again thought of work for the Atlantic Monthly. He wrote to William Dean Howells, the new editor, in 1871, about two long jobs proposed for the Atlantic—Voltaire and Jefferson. The latter was thought "best and safest," though Parton did not feel the decision was right. In the meantime he had studied hard and written three chapters. The appearance of a new book on Jefferson made him pause and inquire once more if the subject were not too hackneyed. Voltaire was his favored subject, and he promised to "do him with the most perfect unsensational safety."

There already existed one important work on Thomas Jefferson—the three-volume biography by Henry S. Randall.² Many useful memoirs and collected materials had been printed after Randall's biography was published, including *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson*, mentioned in the letter to Howells and written by the President's great-granddaughter. Howells, knowing his subscribers' tastes and Parton's vivid style, urged him to continue the Jefferson writing. After an absence of a year and three months from the pages of the *Atlantic*, Parton's name appeared once more, and in January, 1872, the first instalment of a long series on Jefferson was published.³

The relationship with Howells proved as delightful as the one with James T. Fields had been. Letters shuttled constantly between Boston and New York or between Boston and the towns in which Parton was lecturing. Parton's admiration for his editor's talent was matched by his delight at Howells's writing as well, so

¹ Parton to W. D. Howells, July 27, 1871 (MS Collection, Harvard Uni-

versity Library).

² Henry S. Randall, Life and Times of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1853).

A letter from Randall to Parton, June 1, 1868, answering an inquiry concerning an alleged affair between Jefferson and a slave on his plantation, is given in full in Appendix III. Parton had also urged Randall to write a shorter life of the statesman. He replied that he had begun such a work before the war but then stopped (Parton Collection).

³ Atlantic Monthly, XXIX (Jan., 1872), 16-33.

"full of spirit, honor, observation and tenderness." The Jefferson series was captioned according to periods of activity. "One more (article) will land Jefferson in the Presidency," he wrote, "and then I think we had better stop. Stop quietly." The final instalment, "Thomas Jefferson's Last Years," appeared in October, 1873, but there was no "stopping quietly."

11

For his account of Jefferson's later years, Parton had relied largely on the memoirs of a Captain Francis Bacon, who had been for twenty years an overseer at Monticello.⁵ Much that Parton quoted or summarized from these memoirs was innocuous, but some of it was derogatory to members of Jefferson's household—particularly to Thomas Mann Randolph, the husband of his daughter, and John Bankhead, who had married his granddaughter. These men were both portrayed as despots and drunkards.⁶

Thomas Jefferson Randolph, grandson of the President, was indignant over the slur upon the reputation of his father and other relatives. He wrote a protest which was originally published in the Baltimore American⁷ and was widely copied in other newspapers; he also stated his objections in a handbill⁸ which he himself circulated. Howells, as editor of the Atlantic, also received the handbill, which he forwarded to the writer. Parton defended Bacon's views as "substantially correct," citing published letters to that effect and offering to write out "the case of Bacon, but in the most conciliatory way possible for the Randolphs" for the magazine.⁹

⁴ Parton to W. D. Howells, Feb. 16, 1873 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library).

⁶ Rev. H. W. Pierson, ed., Jefferson at Monticello. From the Memoirs of Francis Bacon (New York, 1867). Pierson was a professor at Cumberland College (Kentucky) to whom Bacon recounted his recollections.

⁶ Atlantic Monthly, XXXII (Oct., 1873), 396-399.

⁶ Atlantic Monthly, XXXII (Oct., 1873), 396-399.

⁷ Reprinted in Cincinnati Commercial, Dec. 3, 1873.

⁸ "Jefferson Print" (handbill, Parton Collection).

⁸ "Jefferson Print" (handbill, Parton Collection).

⁹ Parton to W. D. Howells, Dec. 25, 1873 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library). Parton's allusion to his having "cut out the disagreeable passages" refers to the fact that he did not quote the Bacon memoirs, which implied that Jefferson's sons-in-law were imbeciles and that his grandsons were libertines. The Jefferson family got their story in most newspapers of the period; some addressed Parton directly. The Randolphs wrote; one enclosed a letter from William Wertenbaker (letter, W. Wertenbaker to T. J. Randolph, Nov. 22, 1873, Parton Collection). Mrs. Ellen Coolidge, likewise a descendant, wrote Parton saying his series was "a valuable contribution to the history and the literature of this country," but again protesting Bacon as a true source of information (Ellen Coolidge to Parton, Dec. 19, 1873, Parton Collection).

When the biography appeared in book form, not only were the few offensive paragraphs omitted but letters of Colonel Thomas Mann Randolph while a cadet at West Point were added to give flavor to accounts of early Virginia country life. This Life of Thomas Jefferson with the addition of a final chapter and several new pages in the narrative was published by J. R. Osgood and Company.

III

The chapters of the Jefferson had been so popular with Atlantic readers that Howells, in a review, declared readers turned to them first before other magazine pages were cut.10 But Parton had been nagged by critics even during its serialization. The Nation had criticized the serial on "The French Imbroglio of 1798" on the ground that the facts were inaccurate and the reasoning shallow.11 Now the Nation sharply criticized the completed biography, charging that Parton's attitude was that of an oracle and that he constantly confused his own feelings with those of Jefferson. 12 The North American Review examined the book in similar strain.13 Both reviews—the Nation's unsigned, the North American Review's initialed-were in fact the work of the same writer, Francis Sheldon, who thus was able to pronounce two apparently independent judgments. Harper's Monthly alone seemed to plumb Parton's purpose, and in its "Literary Record" described the biography as a stimulating account if "not an original contribution to history," not intended for scholars but rather for the reading public.14

As Sheldon pointed out in the Nation, Parton had for the most part painted Jefferson "all white" and Hamilton "all black." Though the first Secretary of the Treasury was described as a "good fellow: amiable at home, agreeable abroad," he was also portrayed as Jefferson's enemy, as an aristocrat "singularly incapable of Americanization," a man of "British mind and British heart." Four years after the book was published, the Times of London published an interview in which John G. Hamilton, the son of Alexander Hamilton, declared the work was a libel on his

¹⁰ W. D. Howells, review of Life of Thomas Jefferson, Atlantic Monthly, XXXIV (July, 1874), 110-111.

11 Nation, XVI (June 5, 1873), 388.

¹² Ibid., XVIII (April 30, 1874), 284-285.
18 North American Review, CXVII (April, 1874), 405. 14 Harper's Magazine, L (Dec., 1874), 137-138.

father's memory. While accusing Parton of "deliberately inventing expressions and putting them into the mouths of dead celebrities in order to emphasize his prejudices," he gave no specific examples. Parton, exasperated, demanded that Hamilton either retract or substantiate the accusation: even Hamilton's advanced age, Parton wrote, could not excuse him from responsibility for asserting what the biographer considered "an infamous crime."15 No reply was forthcoming, but the incident left its sting.

However tepid the contemporary reviews of Parton's Jefferson, the book has stood the test of time. While the three volumes of Randall remain the best extended account of that period, Parton's single volume ranks high among shorter works. Most of the many subsequent accounts of Jefferson have emphasized some particular phase of his life or have been devoted to some special interpretation. Gilbert Chinard, the French scholar and authority on Jefferson, removed from the partisan attitude of American politics, would "rather use Parton than anybody else,"16 if it were a question of a one-volume account. To be sure, Francis Wrigley Hirst, the English biographer of Jefferson, inclining toward Hamilton and the more orthodox views of economics, found annoying mistakes in the Parton work, though he acknowledged that it was very readable.17 Albert Jay Nock, on the other hand, wrote: "Being neither biographer nor an historian, I feel quite free to say that Parton's biography seems to me still by far the best for the purposes of the general reader. . . . There are qualities that outweigh occasional and trivial inaccuracies and Parton has them. . . . "18

After the praise accorded his previous book on Benjamin Franklin, the unfavorable critical reaction toward the Life of Thomas Jefferson was a disappointment. Financial rewards were also small: the book did not sell as well as Parton's other biographies, and it was not until after the first thousand copies had been sold that the author received the customary 10 per cent royalities.19

¹⁵ Times, Aug., 1878. Clipping in Parton Collection. Not traceable to the New York Times, therefore judged to be the Times of London. This is Parton's reply to Hamilton's accusations.

16 Gilbert Chinard to the writer, June 18, 1940.

¹⁷ F. W. Hirst, Life and Letters of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1926), p. xiv.

¹⁸ A. J. Nock, Jefferson (New York, 1926), p. 333.

¹⁶ Contract, Jan. 1, 1874 (Parton Collection). The book was a slow but steady seller. The 1883 edition, published by Houghton, Mifflin, was the seventh edition of this work.

When in 1869 the editorship of Harper's Magazine changed hands, Henry M. Alden, the new editor, asked Parton for contributions, offering the substantial rate of thirty dollars a page.20 Parton's time, however, was then and for some years to come entirely taken up by his work for the Atlantic. In January, 1874, Alden again wrote Parton and suggested a series of articles on the history of caricature. The profit to be derived from such a task was tempting; the space occupied by illustrations was to be paid at the full-page rate. Fair prospects were forecast, too, for the book sale which Harper Brothers would sponsor.21 Parton talked the job over with Alden²² and by March had set to work on the new subject. He wrote Osgood, his own publisher, explaining the book contract would have to be given Harper's, inasmuch as the greatest expense of the series was the engraving of cuts for the illustrations.23 Throughout his study he was abundantly supplied with editorial suggestions, letters of introduction,24 and frequent notes sent by many interested friends who listed books and other material which might prove helpful.25

Early in 1874 Parton tackled a subject which had been in his mind for several years—the low ethics and misrepresentation practiced by parts of the daily press. He had once touched on this problem in writing and had spoken about it from the lecture platform. Now he presented the long history of corrupt journalism. He entitled his article "Falsehoods in the Daily Press" and sent

the manuscript to the Atlantic Monthly.

The correspondence that followed between Howells and Parton illustrated the tact and sympathetic understanding of that editor toward his contributor. Parton did not foresee, as did Howells, the storm which was bound to follow publication. After reading the essay, the editor wrote its author as follows:

You will take it for granted that I am interested in it, and I hope you won't take it amiss when I tell you that I'm afraid you've treated

²¹ Alden to Parton, Jan. 28, 1874 (Parton Collection). ²² Idem to idem, Feb. 6, 1874 (Parton Collection).

24 Alden to Parton, March 31, 1874 (Parton Collection).

²⁰ Henry M. Alden to Parton, Dec. 16, 1869 (Parton Collection). Parton had previously written three articles for that magazine, the latest of which, appearing 1868, was one on "Silver and Silver Plate," *Harper's*, XXXVII (Sept., 1868), 448 ff.

²³ Parton to J. R. Osgood, March 24, 1874 (Harvard University Library).

²⁵ Miscellaneous collection of such letters in the Parton Collection; some from abroad including one from Thomas Butler Gunn, an early acquaintance.

the subject in such a way that we should be putting our heads in a hornet's nest by publishing the article in its present form. You may be perfectly right: but the age of crusades is past—with publishers. You attack the whole press, in some sort and by such a case as that of the Morristown hanging—of reporters, you imply that all reporters are drunkards. It is doubtful, too, whether you could *prove* the curse of the counting room to be very general. In particular you expose the weakness of Boston journalism. Besides having aggressive features, it seems to me the papers want proportion and unity.

Do you think you could work it over again?—keeping the present start, with little change as far as page 37: then guarding yourself against direct charges of inveracity: modifying considerably what you say about the counting—also the episode of the Morristown hanging, or telling it very briefly—for probably reporters, as a class, are no more drunken

than others. . . .

I make this suggestion very reluctantly, and I must ask your patience.²⁶

Parton was loath to follow the advice. He had thought about the topic so long that revision was difficult. Moreover, in these years he seemed to assume more and more a defensive attitude, an attitude developed because of criticisms leveled at certain radical views which he defended. He determined to stick to his guns. He replied to Howells, anger showing through the amiable surface:

Of course, I am sorry you do not approve my attempt to defend the daily press by putting the blame upon human nature and the hardness of the task attempted. But I do not take it amiss. How could I? You are bound in honor to use your best judgment.

I supposed that one object of putting names to articles was to enable the "hornets" to go to the right person, and spare the magazine. But,

here too, your judgment is final.

The best way is to send it back, and I will see if some of the magazines here will be rash enough to publish it. They all, more than once, asked me for articles, and I might try them with this. I should not like to make such tremendous changes as those you propose, and I cannot think that the time of crusades is past. If it has, I must try and come back again.

Send it back. You have decent papers in Boston, and you do not

suffer from these liars as we do.

"I long to be a martyr.

And with the martyrs stand."

Very truly and entirely yours,

JAMES PARTON²⁷

²⁶ W. D. Howells to Parton, March 11, 1874 (Parton Collection). ²⁷ Parton to W. D. Howells, March 13, 1874 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library).

The editor wrapped up the fiery pages and returned them with the notation that "It is with real grief that I let this go." Before the article arrived, Parton had written a letter in which he showed regret for having turned down Howells' suggestion:

MY DEAR BOY,

I hope I have not been hasty or unreasonable, but perhaps I ought to have said that I was and am willing to do the piece in case you really care to have the subject treated.

I am willing to make it more distinctly appear, and indeed, to state explicitly that the object of the article is to defend and help the press. . . .

I must have the Morristown story, with the exception of taking out the names of the papers involved. That is a typical case, and the one for which I was waiting. All the evils of the press come to a focus on it.

... Think only what is best for yourself.29

But it was too late. Receiving Parton's letter of humiliation, Howells wrote gently but firmly:

Your letter is most kind and generous, but if it will not change your feeling and your old relations toward the Atlantic, I will not ask you to make all those changes, but rather let you print the paper elsewhere. Thinking the matter all over, it appears to me that the article would always seem mutilated and emasculated to you while it would not be quite what we want. You would feel that the force of your blow had been weakened and you would despise us accordingly.

I own that it will give me an awful twinge to see your name in any other magazine but I hope it will be for once only.³⁰

After sounding Alden as to his courage to "print the truth"³¹ and after making some changes along the lines suggested by Howells,³² Parton sent the manuscript to *Harper's Magazine*. Alden accepted it, and the article appeared in the July issue.³³

V

In his article Parton had tried to be fair. He had set forth

²⁸ W. D. Howells to Parton, March 16, 1874 (Parton Collection).

³⁰ W. D. Howells to Parton, March 20, 1874 (Parton Collection). ³¹ H. M. Alden to Parton, March 30, 1874 (Parton Collection).

33 Harper's Magazine, XLIX (July, 1874), 269-280.

²⁶ Parton to W. D. Howells, March 17, 1874 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library).

s² Parton to Howells, June 14, 1874 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library). Parton also thanked the editor for the "very kind, ingenious and useful notice of my big, belabored book—nothing could be better." Later, in the same letter: "If you will glance at my splurge in Harper's, you will see that I availed myself of many of your suggestions."

the myriad difficulties attendant upon the making of a newspaper, and in general he had refrained from citing instances damaging to any particular paper. But approximately one-seventh of the entire article was taken up with an analysis of what the writer apparently considered a typical case of untruthful reporting—the story of the hanging of a certain Lusignani in Morristown, New Jersey, on May 15, 1873. Several newspapers were implicated, among them the New York Tribune. Howells had correctly foreseen what would happen if the article were published. Indignation soon raged like wildfire through the pages of the Tribune.34 According to Parton, the reporters had been anxious to interview the condemned man, but had three times been refused permission to do so. Consequently, he went on, all the reporters except those representing the Associated Press, the New York Herald, and a few New Jersey papers took revenge upon the sheriff by misrepresenting the facts of the hanging. Parton further asserted that the pique of these reporters was largely due to the fact that they had been very drunk the night before.35

Whitelaw Reid, the Tribune's editor, assailed both the article and its writer in no gentle manner.³⁶ Reviewing the Morristown case, Reid stated that Parton's story was "false in spirit and in detail." Reid then added a long catalogue of alleged inaccuracies taken from Parton's other writings. "He has written several readable and entertaining histories, all as blindly partisan as electioneering pamphlets in a Presidential year," Reid continued. "Even in cases where his prejudices do not come into action, he is a writer whom it is pleasant to read but dangerous to quote . . . incapable of accuracy as he is of fairness." In the issue of June 25, George E. Miles, their reporter, wrote a new version of his story in which he reiterated the fact that the sheriff had bungled the execution.

Parton was astounded by this savage attack. Whitelaw Reid had been a personal friend of long standing. The author had often been a contributor to the Tribune at Reid's own invitation and urging.37 Removed from the scene of the quarrel—he was at

36 Harper's Magazine, XLIX (July, 1874), 276.

³⁴ New York Tribune (first article), June 25, 1874. Reid on that same day wrote Parton for an explanation of his article "which inferentially reflects on the Tribune" (letter in Parton Collection).

⁸⁶ New York *Tribune*, July 2, 1874.

⁸⁷ On Jan. 26, 1870, Reid had written to Parton: "I fancy I can afford to pay you about as much for it as the Atlantic could a propos of a contemporary feature article, and it is a good thing even for the most popular of writers occa-

Newburyport at the time-Parton at first did not sense the importance of the Tribune's attack upon his reputation. Thomas Nast, whose guest he had been in Morristown while collecting information about the hanging incident, heard all the New York talk and wrote urging him to take up the cudgels in self-defense. Parton replied:

I was a good deal put out at the blackguard attack in the Tribune, and exceedingly astonished.

I cannot go into that fight, for, as you know, I am engaged for the magazine on other work. . . . As you know, nature has not made me a warrior. I might fight if compelled, but my longing ever is for peace and good humor. Now, to fight with much effect, and keep it up, you must like it.

I hope somebody in Morristown will explain about the soapbox

and the ropes.38

Nast, however, knew that the author must protect not only his own name but the magazine's as well. Witnesses must be called: S. H. Cohen, police reporter, supported the Tribune correspondent in sending his version of what had happened; 39 Dr. P. C. Barker, the medical examiner, however, in his version cited twenty inaccuracies which appeared in each of the twenty published accounts but did not vindicate Parton completely.40 Nast again urged his friend to answer the charges himself:

I don't know what you think, but I think it is worth while to come on here and straighten this matter out a little. . . . Harper's Magazine does not care to kindle a fire which you are not able to quench. After all they'd like to have it backed up.41

Parton finally answered his critic's challenge; the letter he wrote the Tribune was admirable for its restraint. The writer went into great detail to explain how he arrived at the facts of his story, facts he learned by oral and written accounts. It was the personal attack which grieved him most. Parton could do no more than write that the "catalogue of offenses" made against

sionally to freshen his reputation among the common people by appearing in a daily. Faithfully, Whitelaw Reid" (Parton Collection). Contributions included obituary notices of James Gordon Bennett, Louis Napoleon, Chief Justice Chase, and others, as well as the Tribune Lecture Sheet (Letters, Reid to Parton, Aug. 10 and Oct. 15, 1870, Parton Collection).

38 Parton to Thomas Nast, July 5, 1874. Possession of the writer.

³⁰ New York Tribune, July 6, 1874.

⁴⁰ Ibid., July 9, 1874.

⁴¹ Thomas Nast to Parton, July 7, 1874 (Parton Collection).

him was without foundation and in itself a "falsehood" of the

daily press.42

Others interested in the case had joined the discussion, but these writers gave slightly conflicting accounts. At length the affair died down in the columns of the *Tribune*. Other papers seemed to have little interest in taking up the gauntlet which Parton too zealously had let drop. Neither the *Tribune* nor Parton could make the eyewitnesses agree. At the end the *Daily Graphic* pointed out that the *Tribune* was the only paper which stood by its reporters, a fact it thought significant. "Instead of assailing Mr. Parton for pointing out an abuse," the editor commented, "he deserves thanks for his courage, and the papers would do far more to discredit his statements by correcting their errors than by blackening his reputation." "13

Although Parton's reputation did not suffer much from this experience, it was some time before the thwarted crusader could quite forget, even if he were eager to forgive, the Tribune's thrust. His chronic good nature finally got the better of him. At a party given by Mrs. Youmans for Charles Dudley Warner, Parton and Reid met for the first time after the contretemps. Going down a long narrow hall at the Youmanses', Parton, without his eyeglasses, did not recognize his erstwhile friend coming toward him until they were face to face. Suddenly confronted by each other, the two glanced up and laughed. "You were a bad fellow to treat me so," Parton said. Reid quickly replied, "But you attacked my reporter first!" The encounter cleared the air and led to a long and amicable conversation.44 The incident was closed. In a later letter to his family the author mentioned his speech at the Liberal Club, which, he added significantly, was "well reported by Mr. Miles of the Tribune, who felt himself aggrieved by the Harper article."

VI

In the autumn of 1874 James Parton became contributing editor of a new weekly magazine called the New York *Illustrated News*. For this magazine, during the three years of its existence, he wrote a weekly column in which he commented on the passing scene, carried on the crusade for good government and liberalism, and in general gave expression to many of the ideas which he had

⁴² New York Tribune, July 9, 1874.

⁴³ Daily Graphic, July 9, 1874. 44 Family letters, n.d. (Parton Collection).

jotted down in the preceding years in notebooks entitled "Subjects." As a champion of truth and civic reform, Parton made

good use of this medium as long as it lasted.45

The series of articles on the history of caricature, which Parton wrote for Harper's Magazine, entailed twelve months of intensive research and careful preparation, to say nothing of a considerable expenditure on a private collection of material. The survey appeared in the magazine in five instalments, for which Parton received a total sum of approximately two thousand dollars⁴⁶—little enough, all things considered. Harpers published the work in book form under the title, Caricature and Other Comic Art in All Times and Many Lands.⁴⁷

The Caricature and Other Comic Art was a creditable piece of work. Parton had always been interested in art; Nast, his warm friend, aided in keeping this interest alive and in educating it, but the writer's artistic judgments were independent. Then, too, largely through the genius of Thomas Nast, caricature had come to exercise an important influence on American thought. Parton's book was timely, and the reviewers' reactions were favorable.⁴⁸

Harper Brothers to Parton, Feb. 2, 1875 (Parton Collection).

⁴⁸ For some reviews, see Nation, XXV (Dec. 18, 1877), 369; Harper's Monthly, LV (Oct., 1877), 789; Atlantic Monthly, XCI (Jan., 1878), 135.

⁴⁵ New York Illustrated News. For Parton's comments in this journal, see later chapter. The News began publication in Jan., 1875.

⁴⁷ James Parton, Caricature and Other Comic Art in All Times and Many Lands (New York, 1876). Contract for book publication dated Nov. 15, 1876 (Parton Collection).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A FREETHINKER

ARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD once aptly characterized James Parton's sense of values when she described her first meeting with him at a ball in Washington in the sixties. She was struck by the "originality of his disapproval (at the extravagance) even in enjoying the enjoyment of others." On subsequent acquaintance she came to admire the intensity of convictions and the "strength of passion with which he regarded all things that worked for the good of humanity." This depth of feeling toward every reform revealed itself in many liberal viewpoints which the writer supported as he did any matter that would improve mankind.

Parton's lecture tours opened new avenues of influence. He pleaded for simplicity in living, for honesty in government, and for reforms directed toward social welfare. Contacts with persons of importance he regarded as valuable not only for the pleasure they brought him but also for the opportunity they gave him to put forward his ideas of what ought to be done. In 1873 there was talk of nominating General Butler for governor of Massachusetts. Parton wrote a long letter, which he may never have sent, asking Butler's views on labor. He recounted his horror and compassion at learning that factory girls worked eleven hours a day and Butler's vivid narrative of the efforts to have the working day reduced to ten. Now Parton queried Butler on the subject, knowing the resistance of that "class in Massachusetts of highly respectable and truly estimable men, who inherit from their ancestors the necessity of being in the wrong on every point of issue between the Few and the Many." Parton believed firmly in the ten-hour working day and hoped it might, indeed, be reduced to eight. If, the writer continued, Butler would write an answer to his questions, he would see that it was inserted in the newspaper.2

Parton's liberalism was evident in many domains. He did not hesitate to lend his talents to causes which most Americans viewed

Writer, V (Nov., 1891), 231.

² Parton to B. F. Butler, Aug. 9, 1873 (Parton Collection). Perhaps never sent or else a copy of the original.

askance, and he spoke his mind freely, both publicly and privately, on all sort of subjects. He became an active member of liberal societies, ranging from dignified reform organizations to groups of inquirers whose advanced attitude startled the conservative public. Parton looked to the purpose of each organization he served, with no thought of his own reputation. As he grew older, he increasingly lent his efforts to societies known as radical rather than liberal.

Those interested in liberal thought and those devoted to the arts seldom mingled in the New York of those days. In Boston it had been otherwise, the Transcendentalists and radical thinkers being as highly honored in that city as were those who had achieved distinction in other fields. In New York, it was true, Henry Field was emancipated from the Puritan tradition,3 and Youmans was an ardent disciple and perpetuator of Herbert Spencer's scientific interpretations,4 but these were exceptions. Free from family ties and responsibilities after the death of his wife, Parton actively supported all these "free and advanced" societies and associations which flourished in the mid-seventies.5 His older friends, uninterested in such activities, overlooked this aspect of his career or found him delightful in spite of it; he was derided only by those who misunderstood his eager search for truth. His New York relatives rejected and lamented this phase of Parton's interest, yet, like the rest of those who knew him, could not but admire his integrity.

Among the groups that he joined was the Liberal Club of New York, of which he was elected president at its two hundred and fortieth meeting. In his acceptance speech Parton pointed out that the main object of the club was "to discuss subjects of concern to us as men and as citizens with absolute freedom, respecting all honest convictions, while expressing our own without any reserve whatever." It was a period of reaction from liberal principles throughout the world, he told members; in the United States there was an obvious regression in all fields. Yet Parton was not discouraged: "Progress must be often retarded. Those institutions will finally prevail which are most in accordance with inalterable

fact."6

⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Rise of the City, 1878-1898, Vol. X of A History of American Life, Schlesinger and Fox, eds. (New York, 1933), p. 329.

³ Dictionary of American Biography, VI, 364. ⁴ Ibid., XX, 615-616.

^{6 &}quot;The Liberal Club; Inaugural Address of James Parton as President," newspaper clipping, 1873 (Parton Collection).

Suspicion naturally attached itself to these organizations. The newness of certain philosophical and scientific ideas, coupled with their radicalism, gave them no popular support. The newspapers eved them as coldly as did their subscribers. When Charles Bradlaugh made his first trip to this country, advance notices were caustic, but the reception tendered him by distinguished liberal citizens of New York favorably affected the attitude of the press. As a guest of the Lotus Club, a successful speaker at Steinway Hall, and the friend of Wendell Phillips and Charles Sumner, he was treated with considerable respect in this country.7 Liberalism acquired a fashionable standing of its own. Courtland Palmer, a wealthy, brilliant friend of Parton, founded the Nineteenth Century Club, which attracted conservative elements and "made fashionable open discussion" of liberal ideas.8 These groups were most congenial to Parton, and it was Courtland Palmer he visited on his trips to New York after retirement to Newburyport.

TY

The story of American Protestantism is the story of many diverse denominations. In spite of the great schism which led to the establishment of Unitarianism, in spite of Theodore Parker's further break with tradition, and in spite of Transcendentalism—which was, after all, only a mystical flowering of orthodoxy—there has never been an important atheistic movement in the United States.⁹

The writings of the evolutionists—Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley—hastened the disintegration of traditional theological thought, and though some advanced religious leaders attempted reconciliation of the old religion with the new science, such movements had little appeal.

For the most part American agnostics remained aloof from any effort to herd them into clubs or societies founded upon the new gospel. John W. Draper of the University of the City of New York, an outstanding infidel of his day, 10 wrote a History of the Conflict between Religion and Science, which sold twenty-

⁷ Hypatia B. Bonner, Charles Bradlaugh: A Record of His Life and Work (London, 1908), pp. 381-385.

⁸ S. T. Putnam, Four Hundred Years of Free Thought (New York, 1894),

pp. 782-784.

J. M. Robinson, A History of Free Thought in the XIX Century (London, 1929), p. 344.

^{1929),} P. 344.

10 D. M. Bennett, The World's Sages, Infidels and Free Thinkers (New York, 1876), p. 939.

five thousand copies. Another New Yorker, Professor E. L. Youmans, editor of *Popular Science Monthly*, devoted his life to the spread of Herbert Spencer's doctrines. Some years later, Andrew D. White and Moncure D. Conway labored in the same field.

The first organized movement in America for the advancement of "the new religion" was represented by the Free Religious Association, founded in New York in 1867. This Association made little impression upon the popular mind, but it drew into its ranks a number of the intellectual elite. The leading spirit and president of the Association was the well-known independent clergyman, Octavius Brooks Frothingham; other distinguished members were David Wasson, Felix Adler, John W. Chadwick, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Elizur Wright. Jews, Christians, and atheists were members; they were united in the conviction that "the theological epoch draws near its close" and that a new approach to the problems of mankind must be sought. Soon branches of the Association were founded in Boston, New Bedford, and other New England cities.

In 1873 Colonel Higginson suggested that Parton deliver at the New Bedford convention of this Association an address on the "injustice and mischief" of exempting church property from taxation.15 He had long been interested in this subject, and he accepted the suggestion. His address was well received at New Bedford in October, and he repeated it at the New York convention. Parton assailed what he considered the waste and selfishness of the church, described it as a remnant of Puritanical times, and chided it for its indifference, or even opposition, to progress. Whatever property the state protected should in turn contribute to the state, he reasoned. He referred to the half-empty churches of the Protestants and showed how they could gain strength by consolidation; he pointed to the vast extent of property owned by the Roman Catholic Church, much of which had been acquired, he said, through bleeding the poor of the parish. These stateprotected holdings, he went on, often included shops which yielded

¹¹ George E. MacDonald, Fifty Years of Free Thought (New York, 1931), I, 332.
12 Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁸ Freedom and Fellowship in Religion: A Collection of Essays and Addresses, edited by a committee of the Free Religious Association (Boston, 1875), passim.

14 Ibid., introduction, p. 1.

¹⁵ O. B. Frothingham to Parton, Sept. 10, 1873 (Parton Collection).

rents to the Church but on which no taxes were paid to the state.16

Parton's address was the high spot of the convention; according to newspaper accounts it was received with much applause.¹⁷ The Free Religionists themselves knew the value of the address as propaganda. After the discussion which followed, Higginson collected money for its publication, while Frothingham roped into the Association many nonmembers who had been present.¹⁸ But the Free Religious Association itself did not outlive the leadership of its founders. Never having popular support, the organization failed by deviating from its original purpose, "the scientific study of men's religious nature and history."¹⁹

III

Other groups followed the lead of the Free Religious Association. One such, the Society of Humanity, won Parton's hearty support because of his respect for its founder, Thaddeus W. Wakeman, who was deeply concerned with improvement of social conditions. Felix Adler, the president, argued in vain that the Society was not atheistic and had no intention of supplanting the churches,²⁰ but few people would take part in any movement which ran counter to established tradition.

The National Liberal League and the Free Thinkers Society were particular objects of censure. Among the members of these associations were many cranks, who did much to increase the difficulties inherent in the situation. In the effort to bring order out of chaos, Francis E. Abbott, of Toledo, Ohio, founder of the magazine *Index*, in 1872 urged some national convocation of America's free minds. In 1875 plans were made for a national assembly which was to meet in Philadelphia in July, 1876. The week end before the centennial celebration thirty-seven Liberal Leagues joined to form the National Liberal League, with F. E. Abbott as president, and united in the demand for a Constitutional Amendment for Religious Freedom.²¹

Parton attended the convention and made the principal address of the session, entitled "Cathedrals and Beer; or the Immorality

¹⁶ James Parton, Taxation of Church Property. Free Religious Tracts, No. 1, published by the Free Religious Association (Boston, 1873), passim.

¹⁸ New York World, clipping (Parton Collection).

¹⁶ New York Evening Post, clipping (Parton Collection).
17 Freedom and Fellowship in Religion, p. 385.

²⁰ Eleventh Annual Report, Society of Humanity (Boston, 1878), p. 48.
²¹ Putnam, Four Hundred Years of Free Thought, p. 528.

of Religious Capitals."²² This lecture, which he was to deliver on many future occasions, was similar in part to his address on church taxation. He again urged that property as well as men ought to be equal before the law. At the same time he recounted numerous examples where the church shirked its duty or was incompetent to perform it. This was especially true in foreign lands, he felt, and hoped that America would never be handicapped by the rule of the Church over its people.

IV

The Free Thinkers' Conference at Watkins Glen in 1878 was the most radical of all such conventions. Parton, ever ready to do his bit for those shunned by more conservative groups, addressed the assembled free thinkers on "The Coming Man's Religion." His speech was scheduled as the main feature of the convention. Parton asked "What is it to have religion?" His answer was as old as it was simple: "It is to fall in love with your duty. . . . It is to love human welfare . . . [and] the practice of the homely moralities."²³

The Comstock laws, forbidding distribution of obscene literature through the mails, which too often regulated where regulation was unimportant, earned Parton's contempt. About a year after the convention, De Robique Bennett, a man who had earned a small fortune in liniments and medicinal quackery and had become the editor of the Truth Seeker, was jailed for publishing a pseudo-medical pamphlet which he had written on the subject of the miseries of married women. The Truth Seeker, edited in the period of his confinement by his followers, published an appeal, "What Shall We Do About It?" Parton immediately sent a five-dollar bill and in a letter to the editor tendered some frank advice. He did not consider the Bennett paragraph in question "obscene" and concluded Bennett's imprisonment was due to the latter's editorship of the Truth Seeker and to nothing else. But there was a larger aspect of the matter which Parton cautioned should not go unheeded: the magazine, because it con-

28 Rochester (N. Y.) Evening Express, Aug. 26, 1878.

²² The Centennial Congress of Liberals and Organization of the National Liberal League at Philadelphia on the Fourth of July, 1876 (Boston, "printed in full"), pp. 83-92. At this convention Parton contributed twenty-five dollars to the League, a sum exceeded by no other. Also see James Parton: Immorality of Religious Capitals: A lecture delivered in Paine Hall, Sunday Evening, January 28, 1883 (Boston, 1883).

fined "itself to the work of destroying the old instead of establishing the new," was an organ of negation rather than one dedicated to teaching how to live. His hope for this editorial change was now halted by the arrest.²⁴ The letter and its enclosure began a James Parton Club which was financially active during Bennett's imprisonment.

Abhorring the circulation among boys of vicious books and papers, Parton declared that he "could hang the writer who does it"; but he insisted that "espionage of mails by an illiterate person is an even worse evil." He urged the unconditional repeal of the laws because, among other reasons, he objected to the government's sitting in moral judgment in such cases and "because the laws are liable to abuse by narrow-minded or provincial officers."²⁵

It was through the National Liberal League that Parton met the "Great Agnostic," Robert Ingersoll. He shared Ingersoll's views on philosophic questions and respected him for the good qualities which were lost on his detractors. The feeling of admiration was reciprocated. When Parton dipped his pen for liberal defense of such publications as the *Truth Seeker*, Ingersoll commended him. He once wrote: "I want you to keep writing these letters. You have hit a popular vein, and you can do a world of good. Tell them some of their faults, and *all* their virtues. I was delighted with every word."²⁶

The complete accord between the two men, however, was soon to be broken. Shortly after writing the above letter, to the consternation of most of the members of the Liberal League, Ingersoll failed to stand by his expressed objections to the postal regulations instigated by Comstock. Again Parton came forward to encourage the troubled leaders; in an open letter to T. B. Wakeman, published in the *Truth Seeker*, he wrote that Ingersoll was essentially a poet, who had "done so much in that way in other scenes, and occasions of great difficulty and risk that we must not complain that on this one occasion he seems to have injured the cause he has done so much to promote."²⁷

It became more and more difficult to keep the peace among various factions in the National Liberal League. The first split came over the question of support to Bennett. Debate hinged on

²⁴ Truth Seeker, VI (Aug. 9, 1879), 504.

²⁵ Ibid., V (Sept. 28, 1878), 617.

²⁶ R. G. Ingersoll to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).
²⁷ Truth Seeker, VII (Oct. 19, 1880), 664.

whether or not the League should oppose the Comstock Laws in toto. Abbott, in his paper the Index, refused to demand the repeal of the Comstock Laws. As a result Elizur Wright's Truth Seeker became the leading liberal organ. When Ingersoll dropped out of the National League to take his stand with Abbott, Parton, in order to preserve the balance of forces, continued his own membership. In 1885 the National Liberal League was reorganized as the American Secular Union with Ingersoll as president, and Parton was again elected vice-president. Ingersoll knew the mettle of his associate and in his inaugural speech, couched in the flowing language for which he was noted, commented that the members had honored themselves "by electing James Parton, a thoughtful man, a scholar, a philosopher, and a philanthropist—honest, courageous, and logical—with a mind clear as a cloudless sky." under the compared themselves are considered to the members had honored themselves be electing James Parton, a thoughtful man, a scholar, a philosopher, and a philanthropist—honest, courageous, and logical—with a mind clear as a cloudless sky."

v

Parton admired his associates in such organizations for their convictions. None of them personally was an intimate, but all were friends bound by ties of sympathy for their common cause. In written contributions which he occasionally made to their publications or in some answered questionnaire sent him, he took the side of sanity and caution, though he never yielded an inch on a matter of principle. He knew the eagerness with which reactionaries sought to hamper all efforts in the direction of progress. the other hand, he advised the liberals that "no one is more likely to get cranky in his opinions than one who broods too much over the sorrows of mankind" or those "made morbid by excessive regard for themselves."31 "The men," he wrote, "who really help us to a better life are tolerant, patient, modest, and good natured. . . . Free and friendly intercourse with other minds, widely different from our own, is the natural remedy for crankiness."32

Until the last, Parton continued his counsel and his support of liberal and radical organizations. Ever temperate and full of

²⁸ Putnam, Four Hundred Years of Free Thought, p. 528.
²⁰ E. M. MacDonald, Robert Ingersoll as He Is (New York, ca. 1911),

p. 126.
So Truth Seeker Annual and Free Thinkers Almanac (New York, 1886),
p. 46.

p. 46.
³¹ Open Court: A Fortnightly Journal, I (Sept. 22, 1887), 445.
³² Ibid., I (April 14, 1887), 115.

understanding for those who were sincerely opposed to his views, he won the admiration even of those of his associates whose radicalism went to still greater lengths than his own. The author of Four Hundred Years of Free Thought honored him by observing that "he saw the logic of the situation, and he never flinched from the consequences."

⁸⁸ Putnam, Four Hundred Years of Free Thought, p. 785.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

YEARS OF GRACE

BY 1875 the commercial war between Boston and New York was over; Boston could no longer call herself the hub of the universe. Intellectually, however, that city was still the center of American culture. In her halls and in her parlors gathered the leading literary men of Cambridge, Concord, and lesser villages whose roots were entangled with those of Beacon Hill; and pilgrims came to her from afar. None could gainsay Boston's literary pre-eminence, nor was the rest of the country left unaware of the fact. But New York was beginning to lay claim to some share of literary fame. Her hostesses were able to attract many writers and artists of distinction, and her book publishers were constantly gaining in prestige and influence as well as in volume of sales.

The North American Review and the Atlantic Monthly, both New England publications, had provided Parton with the most cultivated reading public of the nation. He was, however, a New Yorker bred, and the difference was real if subtle. Parton loved his fellow-man in a warm, comradely way that was foreign to the

aloof New England intellectual.

James Parton's kindliness and his innate gentleness were transcendant forces in his personality. They made for the ease of manner by which he found himself at home in any society. He never believed in labels. "One does not need to be merely born in America to be an American," he once said; "there are native Bostonians and New Yorkers who are thoroughly English, and there are native Europeans who are thoroughly American in spirit. It is as much a matter of nature as a matter of birth." The worlds of New England and New York were growing closer, yet there was something eager, something sympathetic, in Parton which made him the natural product of the city of his childhood—and made him always in some measure a stranger in New England.

Once on a visit to Boston Parton was guest at a dinner which was also attended by another transplanted citizen of New York, Henry James, senior, then living in Cambridge. Seeing Parton,

¹ Boston Herald, Aug. 20, 1886.

a friend of yore, surrounded by these new associates, James wrote the following day what he had been unable to say in that company:

MY DEAR FRIEND: I am sorry I was cut out of a good talk with you last evening, so sorry that I find it hard this morning to content myself without telling you, that the sight of you revived so keenly the memory of the innocent old days when we were both looking forth for the first time into the world, that my heart softened in me, and I looked down the table to you with repeated longings to change my seat. I never feel exactly at home among these literary bandits. There is such an infuriate self-consciousness among them that one breathes there an intensely subjective atmosphere; you are held down to such strictly conventional knowledge that you come away robbed of all your human substance and go home to a pillow racked with remorse. But the sight of your well remembered face and person yesterday, of your freer and friendlier ways of intercourse, intensified my sensibility to all this state of things to the utmost, and I wanted dreadfully to get near you and bury my head in your dear old unconscious and profligate New York bosom. There, I have eased my mind, in confidence remember to you, and I will now let you go. But don't fail if ever you come back this way to let me see you at once, and believe me, my dear Parton, with sincere regards,

> Yours ever, HENRY JAMES²

II

The pressure at which Parton wrote, the unceasing endeavor to amass some savings out of his income as professional writer, were all directed toward one end—retirement. He longed to be able to devote years to his chef d'œuvre, the Voltaire, and to that end he continued to write, though less assiduously as time went on, for the New York Ledger and for other publications. The lone-liness he felt after his wife's death was not dispelled, however, either by his literary work, his social activities, or his participation in liberal movements.

Newburyport drew him like a magnet. Each year with the coming of June he hastened to that pleasant Massachusetts town which had an unspoiled beauty and was endowed with the best New England traditions. More than anything else it was the company of the little girl, Ethel, and of her aunt, Ellen Eldredge, that made the town what it was to him. Especially he watched with loving care the development of the child. Until she left

² Henry James, Sr., to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).

New York, he had cared for her education entirely.3 In these summer months he walked with her again and delighted in her observations.

In January, 1875, Miss Eldredge wrote that she and her niece would have to move from Tilton's boardinghouse. This news hastened Parton's decision to move from New York, though he wished that Newburyport "were on this side of Boston instead of that."4 A month later he had laid plans to purchase a house in High Street. He looked forward to the move with delight.⁵ In New York he wrote that everyone approved the move, while he considered it "one of the most rational things I ever did." The house and everything permanently attached to it was to belong to Parton, while Miss Eldredge's share was to consist in furnishing the home and managing it. He would live there as a paying boarder; "thus both are independent, nothing is mixed, and all is serene."7 New York friends filled his remaining days in that city with pleasure. Henry Field after the death of his wife, Henrietta, gave him two "gorgeous" silver lamps. "Please accept them, not from me, but from Mrs. Field," he quoted Field as writing. "She always regarded you with a feeling of true friendship-as do I."8

On May Day, 1875, James Parton once more stepped from the train at Newburyport, this time as a citizen of the town. He was not an unfamiliar figure. He had friends there whose acquaintance he had made in New York or Boston-the Spoffords, who lived near in that town, and John Greenleaf Whittier, who lived in Amesbury a short distance away. Townspeople who knew Miss Eldredge and Ethel and had previously greeted him as a visitor, welcomed him now as a resident. Only a few regarded him suspiciously as a radical free thinker who was planning a biography of Voltaire as the culminating achievement of his writing career. One rabid revivalist demanded to know if such a heretic were desirable as a fellow citizen,9 but such critics proved rare exceptions, and Parton received a cordial welcome from most Newburyport people who knew him, his books, or the gentle ladies he was to join.

His delight was to stop and talk with those he met in the

Ethel Parton in S. J. Russell Book of Authors (New York, 1935), p. 290.

Social 1875.

Family letter, Feb. 28, 1875. Ethel Parton in S. J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (eds.), The Junior

Family letter, Jan. 24, 1875.

Family letter, Jen. 25, 1875.

Family letter, April 13, 1875. Family letter, Feb. 25, 1875. 8 Ibid., April 9, 1875.

⁹ Family recollections. Many undocumented statements are gained either from interviews or letters to the writer.

streets: the fishermen, the old captains, the young boys who recognized each incoming train by its distinctive whistle. It was a habit which brought him close to life. In such a place as Newburyport he felt one could find the best people in the world, those who understood the beautiful and noble art of economy and could live better on a thousand dollars a year than did people in New York on a thousand dollars a month. 11

III

The Parton house was a large square clapboard one at the corner of High and Oakland Streets. Though modern, it was as simple as the older houses. When Miss Eldredge and Parton first saw it, the white paint was almost gray, but they were attracted by the small garden and by the bay windows on either side of the doorway.

It was Ellen Eldredge's task to improve the house, and she loved doing it. The exterior was painted a soft brown, the paints mixed to match a sample of knitting wool. A small front porch before the doorway was later added and was built so that it ran along Oakland Street and turned at the back to join the kitchen in the ell. Later still, the second story was extended at the rear. Part of the furnishings were from the New York house—chairs, a long mahogany sideboard, and some tables. Family portraits were hung to add hominess. New furniture purchased was simple and inexpensive, but the effect obtained was tasteful.

Parton's large first-floor study was lined from floor to ceiling with the books he had collected. His long narrow desk was placed so that he sat with his back to the south window. There was every facility for comfort—a couch, a round table big enough to hold a load of books and a pile of manuscripts or magazines. The side window looking out on the narrow western veranda gave a cross current of air throughout the summer. Most important were shelves in one corner devoted to works of Voltaire and his critics. In the first years of his Newburyport residence these were the books he consulted most. The room was his study by day and became the living room at night as the family gathered about the table to read.

The small garden was improved. The forlorn pear trees were cut down to make room for two ash trees, two Norway spruces, and a red maple. Small flower beds were set out, and in hours

¹⁰ Parton's subject notebooks list such charms "of a New England town."

¹¹ New York *Ledger* clipping, n.d., on Bayard Taylor (Parton Collection).

stolen from his writing Parton cultivated dahlias, primroses, tuberoses, and pinks. An additional plot at the rear of the house was bought and planted in vegetables: corn and squash which had a way of escaping to neighboring yards, beans growing on tall poles, and peas which it was the author's ambition to have ready for the family's Fourth of July dinner.

Parton was not gifted domestically. His sole accomplishment was tending the furnace, a task he had performed in New York. The winters were cold, and the coal bin had to be frequently replenished; the cheer in the house was inexhaustible. Parton was at last genuinely at home with friendly neighbors, a family to devote himself to, and a town small enough for him to assume active duties of citizenship.

The first year in Newburyport passed uneventfully. Each lecture excursion into the busy world made home more attractive. Parton urged his old editor, James T. Fields, and Mrs. Fields to visit him:

"N. B. No fuss or flummery—smallish house—one 'girl'—New England style, do as you like in all respects." 12

IV

The old estrangement between Miss Eldredge and Parton had long passed in common devotion to the child of the family, and an affectionate relationship had grown up between the two. Things finally reached a climax. On the third of February, 1876, less than a year after his retirement in Newburyport, James Parton and Ellen Eldredge, in the presence of a few friends who had been asked to their home, were quietly wed by the minister of the First Church. The Partons, however, had overlooked an old statute in the Massachusetts law books which forbade the union of a man and his stepdaughter. Two days later they learned of the illegality of their marriage. The news stunned the bridal couple. There was no old friend in the town on whom they might unload the burden which had fallen so suddenly upon their shoulders, and they turned to Robert Bonner, trusted counselor of Parton and Fanny Fern. Parton wrote the first part of the letter; it was finished by the young wife, to whom Bonner was as dear as any relative.13

¹² Parton to Fields, Dec. 12, 1875 (MS Division, Library of Congress).

¹³ Letter, Parton and Nelly Eldredge (Parton) to Robert Bonner, Feb. 7, 1876 (MS Division, New York Public Library).

NEWBURYPORT, Mass. Feb. 7, 1876.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

For by that name I now venture to call you. A friend you have been to this household, which never needed friends so much as now.

We are all in the deepest affliction. Three days ago, Ellen Eldredge and myself were married—having long ago lived down our old enmity, and having been drawn into mutual affection and confidence that ended naturally and properly in marriage. The ceremony took place in our own home: in the usual way, in the presence of a company of friends. The notice, written by my own hands, was printed, and I personally obtained a license required by the laws of this state.

Forty-eight hours after, the clergyman who married us brought us the astonishing news that the marriage is illegal, being forbidden by law—an ancient statute. Such a thing had never crossed my mind. I supposed that in the United States, where no natural impediment existed there was no legal impediment. In many states such is the

case, but as it seems, not in this. . . .

Mrs. Parton took up the pen from that point:

My DEAR MR. BONNER:

I found the enclosed unfinished letter of Jim's, and as he has gone to Boston, I will finish it for him. The law he refers to is one forbidding stepfathers to marry their stepdaughters, and he has gone to see General Butler about getting such an unjust law repealed. came so like a thunderbolt to us, this news of its being unlawful, but as soon as we knew it, we both thought it best for Jim to take up his abode at the hotel here, which he has done since Saturday afternoon. I feel under such disadvantage in writing of this matter to you because, as you have not been with us for three years, you cannot understand how gradually enmity turned to trust, trust to esteem, and esteem to affection; but I can safely and truly say, though Jim's goodness to us since we came to live in Newburyport has been perfectly meltingthough at last he left everything and everyone to come to us, yet the thought never crossed my mind that he cared for me as he does until he proposed to me. And so how can I expect it to be anything but a great surprise to you-perhaps even a painful one. I can only tell you truly how it was-We had learned to be so happy in our dear little home, we three together, the only drawback was the feeling, which I had, that though he loved Effie most tenderly and protectingly, he was merely doing his duty to me for my mother's sake and Effie's, and I thought, perhaps if I am very kind to him and thoughtful of his comfort, as he is of mine, he will in time, learn to have a little Effie feeling for me, but it seems he had loved me for some time, but feared telling me so, as he could not tell how I would receive it, and it would be

hard to go back to our old relations after such a confession, though he most generously promised never to mention the subject again if I did not feel as he did about it. Well, I thought it all over-his great goodness to us-how changed he was (for he is no more like the James Parton of three years ago than day is like night), how lonely but for us, how Mother wished us with her dying breath to always live together, and how happy we had been together in our home, and when the thought of our being fragments of families—why, would it not be better, holier to make one family; and the thought did enter my frizzly head that I could love this new changed Jim. So we were married a week after I said yes, and none of our friends, except my minister, knew of our intention until they were invited here to tea one evening, just a very few of them, and before tea, the ceremony was performed which has since been declared illegal. Jim has been so overcome by the thought that he has brought this trouble to me, and I have had to affect more courage than I really possess, but I suppose the worst thing which could befall us would be our having to live in some other state; this, however, we do not wish to do as we love our home, and because it would be a sort of confession of wrong to run away and we are both innocent of any wrong for how could we know of such an unjust old law, when the gentlemen present at our marriage, and the clergyman who performed the ceremony did not know of itno, we will stay and fight bravely—not living together until it is settled. But I do feel that my native state should do me justice. Now my dear friend I have poured out my very heart to you, so do write me soon if only a line. Heaven help you for old times' sake.

> Your poor little friend— NELLY ELDREDGE (PARTON)

On the advice of General Butler, the Partons left for New York, where on the tenth of February, 1876, the marriage was again performed, this time by Reverend Stephen Tyng¹⁴ under a New York State license. Returning home, they were felicitated by friends who were sympathetic to their troubles, for only a few proved critical. Relatives of Mrs. Parton and New York friends—the Willises, the Charliers, and even the old Irish maid—sent greetings hailing the marriage as most suitable.¹⁵ To Parton's relatives, however, it proved a shock, driving the separating wedge deeper, and though the family tie was never broken, contacts lapsed.

Now, legally married, Parton and his wife petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts, praying them to recognize their

15 Family letters.

¹⁶ New England Magazine, VII, N.S. No. 5, 627.

first marriage. The request for a special act was regretted. What they sought was the clearance of any doubt regarding the legal status of the marriage in the state. It was not a request to enable them to marry, the petition continued, but one to set right a marriage "so complete that nothing can undo it."16

It was embarrassing to Parton as an apostle of freedom to ask favors, but some solution seemed necessary—the author knew too well how intolerance would use the incident against him, and he feared it. The bill passed almost unanimously in the Senate, and by a good majority in the House. But Governor Rice vetoed it on the grounds that its passage would be "contrary to principles of legislation and the good of society." The veto came as a blow, but its force was mitigated by the warm sympathy of fellow townsmen and of friends elsewhere. Parton wrote Bonner: "The Governor, it seems, is a high Churchman, and reads his Leviticus."17 Mrs. Parton in a postscript recorded: "All this trouble ought to make me most wretched, but I have so much else to make me happy that it can only trouble me by fits."18

Parton's prominence brought wide comment on the action. The Nation, which had cooled perceptibly in its attitude toward him, upheld the Governor's action, asserting that marriage statutes should not be tampered with, that the fact that these statutes were not uniform in the different states brought trouble enough without the additional chaos of special legislation. Nor did it fail to mention the obvious: "It is by a poetical sort of justice that Mr. Parton, who has always been a worshipper of the 'dictates of Nature,' should by this little oversight be suddenly made to feel how very disagreeably they can be interfered with by those of the law."19 There was solace in friends such as Bonner, who tacked a note of encouragement to a payment for Ledger articles. Parton wrote in reply:

The veto was a stunning blow to me, and the manner of it added much to the misery it caused. For some days, I could not rally from it. But the people have been so good to us . . . and I have the dearest, homiest of wives, a darling girl, a pretty little house nearly paid for, and a

¹⁶ Petition of James Parton and Ellen Eldredge Parton to the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Feb. 14, 1876 (copy, Parton Collection).

17 Parton to Robert Bonner, May 2, 1876 (MS Division, New York Public

¹⁸ Ibid., postscript by Nelly Parton. 19 Nation, XXII (May 4, 1876), 287.

garden. I ask nothing, and desire nothing, but that these may continue.20

V

The hurt soon healed, and Parton had the quiet he long had sought to work as he pleased. He continued to write for the New York *Ledger*; an article by him appeared there every two weeks, and for each contribution he was paid fifty dollars.²¹ The money helped considerably in the running expenses of the new home.

The move to Newburyport did not lessen Parton's old interest in governmental reform. He fought this battle in his weekly columns of the New York Illustrated News, of which he was contributing editor.22 He cautioned his readers that they must not "glory in the good government in Washington and overlook the shame." "They are both ours," he wrote. "The one to enjoy, the other to remedy."23 Parton also carried forward his exposure of New York's municipal government and tried to find a solution. The secret caucus and the "grog shop conclave," he said, should be replaced by an open meeting of voters in each district at which aldermen would be elected. Eligibility for elective offices should be subject to property qualifications. He suggested that the mayor be elected to serve ten years and be eligible for a second term; that he be paid twenty thousand a year and a retirement pension of four thousand.24 Parton was still convinced that the temptation to take graft would be greatly reduced if all office-holders were persons of means to start with and that it would be further reduced if they received proper salaries.

Eighteen seventy-six was the year of the Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia, and Parton, with Ethel as his companion,

20 Parton to Robert Bonner, May 19, 1876 (MS Division, New York Public

Library).

There are many brief notes of Parton to Bonner in the New York Public Library, MS Division. Most of these are short statements of the number of articles submitted and urgent suggestions such as this, "I am late this year in sending an account of my proceedings in 1875, having been absent a good deal, and having had difficulty in making the accounts balance. We are like the early Christians in having most things in common, and it is not always easy to keep exact accounts between us" (Feb. 4, 1876).

²² No complete file of the New York Illustrated News exists. It was a poorly illustrated folio lacking the popular appeal of Bonner's journal, Leslie's Illus-

trated, or Harper's Weekly.

New York Illustrated News, June 17, 1876.

²⁴ New York *Illustrated News* (Nov., 1874?), clipping, "The Government of Cities" (Parton Collection).

visited it early in July. He touted its wonders in his column. Go, he urged, the barn will wait its new coat of paint. Remember the teachers, too, Parton wrote, recollecting his own early struggles. Don't give them a useless gift, he suggested, give them money that they may invest in this cultural treat of the Philadelphia Exposition.25

At a time when strikes were viewed with horror, Parton championed the workingman and his right to form unions and demanded to know how many four-cent papers ever took the side of the worker. He predicted that in the future "Labor will be apt to claim too much and Capital to concede too little."26 Politically his position was often self-contradictory. As Redpath pointed out, he was generally conservative but appreciated the opposite view when he finally understood it.²⁷ Both times General Grant ran for President, Parton supported him; 28 nor did he ever join the liberal Republican wing. He felt the Negro was unripe for political privileges and that the North was too harsh in its Southern policy.²⁹ But Parton's liberalism was not confined to mere lip service. He vigorously campaigned for decency, refused to attach blame to any one man as in the case of the maligned President Grant, and held steadfast to the belief that the country would in time free itself from the control of organizations which held power through political corruption.

Boston newspapers frequently sought Parton's views on current events. At the time of the depression which followed the panic of 1877, he asserted his belief in the "true American policy of Jefferson and Madison of the Old Democratic party" before 1816. He expressed the hope that the "feverish, rapid development [of manufactures] was ended," and the opinion that even New England was considering the merits of free trade. He maintained that the adoption of free trade was a matter of paramount importance to recovery.

Parton was much interested in factory conditions throughout New England and sympathized with the worker's hardships,

²⁵ New York Illustrated News, July 7, 1876. 26 Ibid., n.d., clipping (Parton Collection).

²⁷ Boston Herald, ca. 1880, clipping (Parton Collection).
²⁸ Parton to Nast, quoted in Paine, Th. Nast, His Period and His Pictures,

Clipping, "Southern Bitterness," New York Illustrated News (Parton Collection).

which were increased by the depression. He urged the union of farm and factory—the factories, he said, could function in months when the worker was not tilling the soil. The company homes were unattractive and the towns depressing. As a subscriber to the Fall River Labor Journal, Parton said he had come to appreciate the worker's problems and insisted, as he had done before, that "the right to strike is as sacred as the right to make war upon great provocation. It has saved the working people a great deal of oppression. It cut down their hours of labor from sixteen hours to ten." In 1878 few men in Parton's position dared take such a stand.

Newburyport came to know Parton as a man with an understanding of men of all classes; he was regarded as a fellow-townsman rather than as a stranger whose reputation placed him apart. His influence for good was well recognized, and at times he was able to point out errors which the natives could not see so clearly.

³⁰ Interview with Boston newspaper, "Causes and Cures of Hard Times," clipping dated July 21, 1878 (Parton Collection).

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

VOLTAIRE

FOR FIFTEEN YEARS Parton had planned to write a life of Voltaire. Not once had his hope of accomplishing this task faded. His decision to write the biography of the great French rationalist stemmed from genuine admiration for that man, and except for the size of the job, he would have undertaken it upon the completion of his Life of Franklin. The Frenchman's life required more than the one, two, or three years he usually devoted to an American biography. With no descendants or former friends of his subject to consult, no mass of relevant material at hand, and French sources not easily accessible, the Voltaire was more complex than any previous undertaking. Most needed were time and money—time to sift and weigh, money to track down books not only in America but also in France and England. Parton began happily enough, conscious of the magnitude of the task he had assigned himself, yet not realizing the complexity of the materials which soon would confront him. As early as 1867 he reported progress on the biography, which had yet a dozen years to go before publication. He never tired of his project; the Life of Voltaire was truly his labor of love.

The mere idea of writing a life of Voltaire was sure to shock the American reading public; a more unpopular subject could not have been chosen. Voltaire to the Protestant and Catholic mind alike was the anti-Christ, the arch unbeliever for whom they had no sympathy or understanding whatever. But to Parton, Voltaire was the ideal "impartial religionist," the great man of his time.² No word of caution from any fellow-writer, no sage advice from any editor could dissuade him from the work to which he had

set himself.

As early as 1864 Parton had mentioned his cherished plan to Charles Eliot Norton, and Norton had tried to draw him off the subject. The editor was, however, sympathetic. He wrote:

I can easily imagine the greater attraction of a Voltaire. It is a subject of far more picturesqueness and of far more world-wide interest than

¹ Parton to Fields, Feb. 13, 1867 (MS Collection, Huntington Library). ² Critic, XIX (N.S. XVI) (Oct. 24, 1891), 218.

any American one. The misunderstanding of Voltaire's character is so general, and the false opinions concerning him so deeply rooted, that I do not wonder at your desire to do justice to him. But in order to do so, what immense labor is required! His own works, in the first place, are as much as most men read in a life time—and the works about him, more than you can read...³

In February, 1866, Norton tried again his powers of persuasion: "Why go to the old World for a topic (even though it be such as Voltaire) while the new world affords such subjects?" he asked. "Or was this question simply one of those with which Satan rebuked sin?" Only after Parton's writing on Voltaire was well under way did Norton generously praise the project, wishing with good reason that the biographer's time had been employed on his major task rather than on the Caricature History which the author had sent him.⁵

ΙI

Others, however, were quick to send encouragement. The critic R. Shelton Mackenzie, who had found the Franklin biography delightful, commented: "Voltaire is a grand idea. Materials enough and to spare." Moreover, from the time he learned of Parton's project, Mackenzie, who was in constant touch with literary developments abroad, looked out for European items which might be to the biographer's purpose. In 1866 he wrote Parton about a new Life of Voltaire by Francis Espinasse, reviewed in the London Athenaeum. Parton, who by this time had been working on Voltaire off and on for two years, replied that if the biography had been done "in the right spirit and in a tolerable manner," he would give up willingly. He would be well paid by the instruction gained already from his labor.

The volume by Espinasse did not stop Parton; he continued his research and reading. Fields was always understanding. He agreed with Parton on the inadvisability of printing too long an account of Voltaire in the *Atlantic Monthly*, interesting as Parton might make the man. "But what a book you can make of that subject!" he added. "I long to see it in type and use it." These

³ Charles Eliot Norton to Parton, Aug. 24, 1864 (Parton Collection).
⁴ Idem to idem, Feb. 15, 1866 (Parton Collection).

Idem to idem (1874?) (Parton Collection).

^e R. Shelton Mackenzie to Parton, Nov. 1, 1864 (Parton Collection).

⁷ Idem to idem, Dec. 13, 1866 (Parton Collection).

⁸ Parton to Mackenzie, December 17, 1866 (Pennsylvania Historical Society).
9 Fields to Parton, March 20, 1866 (Parton Collection).

expressions of interest made up in large measure for the disapproval shown by such uncomprehending souls as Harriet Beecher Stowe and later William Dean Howells, 10 who succeeded Fields as editor of the *Atlantic*.

In 1869 John Morley, the celebrated English statesman, essayist, and biographer, visited the United States and had a long talk with Parton about a Voltaire work which he too was contemplating. There was an exchange of ideas, and Parton's research added considerably to the English author's store of knowledge. Morley's volume appeared in 1872. We have no record of Parton's opinion of the English work. Critics agreed that it was an admirable study, but it was an interpretation rather than a biography.

It was financially impossible for Parton to concentrate on this subject to the exclusion of other work. The additional Atlantic articles, the Jefferson series, and lecture tours provided interludes which aided reflection upon his material. A dozen years elapsed between the time he first mentioned the project to his publishers and the completion of his manuscript. Each check brought him closer to the longed-for peace of mind; every dollar garnered from shorter articles counted as pay for the biography which Parton knew would never pay for itself.

III

The further he pursued his biography, the more Parton thought it a good subject from every standpoint. Since his removal to Newburyport, he had redoubled his efforts to complete the work. Some five hundred books on Voltaire lined the walls about his desk. A hundred black-bound French volumes, the complete writings of the man, were the first such collection imported into this country. For five years Parton wrote and rewrote what he regarded as his magnum opus. The long series of Ledger articles, the weary hours spent on lecture tours now found reward in the quiet of his Newburyport study, where with the help of a thousand books and with much hard thinking of his own, he reconstructed the life, the mind, and the character of Voltaire.

The publication of the Life of Voltaire presented a serious problem. The subject remained a touchy one, and a two-volume

12 Boston Herald, Aug. 20, 1886.

18 Ibid

¹⁰ Undated letters from Harriet B. Stowe and W. D. Howells (Parton Collection).

Boston Evening Tribune, Oct. 20, 1891 (Parton Collection).

edition was considered a publishing risk. Osgood and Company, who had issued Parton's previous works, were no longer in business. Their successors, Houghton Mifflin Company, hesitated to accept this new biography. In this period of indecision, Parton wrote Osgood for counsel. He had only six weeks' work to do on it and explained that there was nothing "revolutionary or violent or extreme" in the work.

It is such a book as any conscientious Christian might publish, because the personal faults and errors of the man are not concealed, and the necessity of a religious principle is insisted upon.¹⁴

At length, however, all difficulties were overcome, and on December 22, 1880, a contract for the two-volume *Life of Voltaire* was signed between the author and Houghton Mifflin Company.¹⁵ It was the best Christmas gift Parton could have wished for.

IV

First reactions to the Voltaire came from friends. Parton was deluged with commendations which rang happily in his ears. James Redpath, then doing some work on his Irish studies, wrote him that he scarcely knew which to admire most—Parton's skill in handling the mass of facts or the Voltairian tact with which he had handled his subject's private life. He considered that Parton had given the first clear view of the man "for everybody, until you appeared, seemed to regard Voltaire, not as a great man but as a great text." E. P. Whipple, the Boston critic, wrote: "Though I have little more than dipped into it: still I have read enough to convince me that it is the best biography of Voltaire ever written."

The Nation's review of Parton's Life of Voltaire was the first to appear. The reviewer said that all Parton's works had the same defects and the same merits. The chief failure in this one, he thought, lay in the laxity of the biographer's style, in his poor translations of Latin and French, while other French passages remained untranslated, thus adding to the reader's difficulty. Withal, it was a fair estimate:

Of Mr. Parton's volumes, it may with absolute truth be said that 'you neither can praise them or blame them too much.' A reviewer, there-

Parton to J. R. Osgood, June 9, 1880. Possession of writer.
 Contract, Parton with Houghton Mifflin (Parton Collection).
 James Redpath to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).

¹⁷ E. P. Whipple to Parton, July 6, 1881 (Parton Collection).

fore, who wishes to act justly at once by the public, who have a right to discriminating criticism, and by a meritorious author, who has a

claim to a due mead of praise. . . .

Mr. Parton's defects are a conspicuous want of critical acumen, and a deficiency in that complete literary training and education which in the present day must be possessed by any man who wishes to take rank with such biographers as Strauss or Morley. . . . (But) whatever be the deficiencies in Mr. Parton's workmanship, his work has many great and rare merits. . . . It is, in the first place, exactly what it terms itself—a genuine life of Voltaire. . . . Throughout his work there is an amount of sound and calm judgment. 18

The critic's final advice to his readers was to read the book and

enjoy it.

The Atlantic Monthly's review, by James Freeman Clarke, was gratifying, though the same failings that the Nation had noticed were pointed out. Clarke compared Parton in a half dozen ways with Macaulay. Like other reviewers, he pronounced the Voltaire biography a "standard work of great value," one destined to be read, not like Morley's Voltaire, for its philosophic argument, but for the facts it contained and for the vivid presentation of the man who was its subject. 19

When Parton's two volumes were published in England they received proper recognition. The notice in the Fortnightly Review, which Morley himself edited, was written by George Saintsbury. Only the essays of Carlyle and the short book by Morley, Saintsbury wrote, had presented the rationalist to the English-speaking peoples. America had completely disregarded him. There was need, the critic continued, for a work which should pick up these previous literary essays and arrange the pieces in proper form. Of the American author and his work he reported:

He writes fairly well, and seems to have taken a great deal of trouble with his work: but he does not appear to possess anything like the width of literary culture which is a necessary equipment of anyone who writes on Voltaire. He makes a good many grotesque blunders, and his critical powers seem to me altogether defective. But he has got a very great deal of information about his hero from a large number of different sources, and his book, with exception of the eight volumes of Desnoiresterres, gives probably the most extensive and fullest store of

¹⁸ Nation, XXXIII (Oct. 6, 1881), 276-278. A second review of this work appeared in the columns of this magazine a few weeks later. This, however, was an estimate of Voltaire the man as presented by Parton. See Nation for Oct. 13, 1881, p. 297.

¹⁸ Atlantic Monthly, XLVIII (Aug., 1881), 260-273.

information of the subject to be found between the covers of any single work.20

France apparently took no notice of this work. Volumes on Voltaire already filled many shelves in that country. Desnoiresterres had long before given his fellow countrymen the definitive life of Voltaire, which today remains a monument not only to the genius of his subject but to the author himself. For nonreaders of French this notable work by Parton filled a vacuum in literature. The *Publishers' Weekly* observed that "its worst faults are those slight and incessant ones resulting from his never quite coming up to his subject, for a biographer when he can, should write down to his hero, not up at him." ²¹

v

The American public did not warm to this biography.²² The subject itself was viewed with suspicion, and the tact with which the author had presented it was not of much avail. As it turned out, the English really held Parton's Voltaire in much more esteem than did the American people for whom it was primarily written. Not only did it receive extended notice in the reviews, but leading authors also paid tribute to its excellence.²³

Considered as a climax to the career of the biographer, the Life of Voltaire was disappointing in that it failed to achieve the popular success accorded his previous lives. Yet the serious, if qualified, praise of the reviewers and the knowledge that he had finally accomplished his dream of years—all these things combined

to give Parton a feeling of contentment.

²¹ Publishers' Weekly, XVII (June, 1881), 77. ²² Critic, XIX (Oct. 24, 1891), 218.

²⁰ Fortnightly Review, N.S. CLXXVI (Aug., 1881), 149.

²³ The Boston Evening Tribune, Oct. 20, 1891, in its obituary of Parton, reported that John Morley had termed the Voltaire a "triumph," and that George Meredith ranked it with Boswell's Life of Johnson.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

REWARDING FRIENDSHIPS

EWBURYPORT BROUGHT James Parton a richer and fuller life than he had ever known. The home on High Street was a happy one, and the town steeped in the traditions of two centuries gave him ready welcome. The writer delighted in

the intimate contacts of this neighborly place.

The storm over his second marriage quickly subsided. His wife won all who knew her by the gentle simplicity and charm of her manner. On leaving Miss Jane Andrews, who had developed the training Parton had begun, Ethel, still the radiant center of the household, had entered the Putnam Free School. Parton continued to follow intently every phase of her progress. He also endeared himself to his fellow townsmen by taking an active part in local educational activities. He wrote for the school newspaper on occasion² and gave generously of his talents.

At the end of January, having occasion to ask Bonner for a check in payment for articles contributed, he continued, "As we are hourly expecting a Guest, who as we fondly hope, will be a boy weighing about eight pounds, I think it is high time I set about throwing in supplies." On February 13 their first child was born. He sent the news to his old friend and counselor: "It is a girl, and a pretty one, with a vigorous yell and a smacking suck. Mother as well as we could hope, and very happy." They named the baby Mabel. Recalling their earlier troubles, now vanished, Mrs. Parton wrote Bonner that the best of names under the circumstances would have been "Comfort Parton."

Two years later a son was born; they named him Hugo after Parton's hero, Victor Hugo.⁶ The boy meant much to James Parton; as a small child he was a joy to watch, and his later

² Ethel Parton to the writer, July 6, 1939.

Idem to idem, Feb. 14, 1877.

6 New England Magazine, N.S. VII, 632.

¹ Kunitz and Haycraft, The Junior Book of Authors, p. 290.

⁸ Parton to Robert Bonner, Jan. 31, 1877 (MS Collection, New York Public Library).

⁵ Ellen Eldredge Parton to Robert Bonner, Nov. 21, 1877 (MS Collection, New York Public Library).

development was followed eagerly. Yet there were no favorites in the Parton household—each child was given equal devotion.

Parton now came to realize the happiness of fatherhood. He declared that the greatest mistake a man could make was not to marry early and have many children. To please Ethel he had always brought home books and toys. Now on his trips to New York and Boston he spent hours window shopping, considering what best he might choose to delight his family.⁷

It was always a pleasant surprise to Parton to hear from some temporarily lost relative, away in the West perhaps but never quite forgotten. Contact with those he had not seen for years was difficult to maintain. His sister Ann's daughter wrote him of her family and proudly he replied:

You are happy in having so many children, and I wish I had six or seven myself. It is hardly possible to bring up one or two children well. They are not let alone enough. They are too awfully precious. Our Mabel is now 11½ years old; Hugo, nearly 10. Both are good children, very affectionate and very playful. Hugo is now in the water trying hard to learn to swim. He thinks he can swim 'one stroke.' . . . 8

H

As the years went by, trips to New York became less frequent; and Boston, an hour away by train, became the center of Parton's outside activity. There he could meet his publishers on short notice, delve in the libraries, or execute whatever business he found necessary.

Old literary friendships continued. In 1881 Harriet Beecher Stowe, now in declining health, was guest of honor at a party given by her publishers. Those present, in addition to the innumerable Beechers and Stowes, included many who had known her from the earliest days of her success, among them Parton. It was then the celebrated authoress gave what was to be the last of her readings, and it was then, too, that many veteran contributors to the Atlantic Monthly met together for the last time.

General Butler continued to urge his biographer to join him on his yacht, America. Parton felt no inclination to accompany the hardy sea traveler on a sail to Cuba, but the next year, in 1882, he relented and went for a two weeks' trip up the St. Lawrence

Boston Evening Tribune, Oct. 20, 1891.

Parton to Fanny Shaver, Aug. 10, 1888. Possession of Mrs. Will Rainey.
L. B. Stowe, Saints, Sinners, and Beechers (Indianapolis, 1934), p. 215.

to Quebec. "It was a very merry, interesting party, very unliterary men who had lived in the world, but learned from that great Book of Books," Parton wrote his family, confessing both a yearning to be home and a nasty attack of seasickness. 11

One day at the end of 1881 Colonel Higginson asked Parton to lunch with him in Boston in order to meet the great English writer on America, James Bryce, the only other guests being Governor Long and Wendell Phillips. The host particularly wished Bryce to "meet some of our more radical men." Parton, of course, accepted the invitation. Five years later Bryce remembered the author vividly and spoke of the good talk they had had together. 13

III

There was no literary friend James Parton regarded with greater enthusiasm and affection than William Dean Howells. The year the novelist joined the staff of the Atlantic, Parton made his first contributions to its pages. From the summer of 1867, when they first met at Brattleboro, the biographer and the novelist who later became his editor kept in constant touch with each other. The admiration was mutual, and Howells expressed his belief in the abiding excellence of Parton's work. As for Parton the man, Howells declared "no man ever came near him without in some measure loving him. To me he was of a most winning personality, which his strong, gentle face expressed, and a cast in the eye which he could not bring to bear directly upon his vis-a-vis, endeared. I never met him without wishing more of his company, for he seldom failed to say something to whatever was most humane and modern in me." 14

From the beginning Parton was a devoted admirer of the younger writer. In 1873, when A Chance Acquaintance was appearing serially, he wrote to his "very great Friend and Ally," commenting:

What impresses me most is, that a genuine artist is a preacher of righteousness, but he preaches it by practicing it in his own work, as well as by exhibiting it in his characters. You are an honest, good boy....

¹⁰ Family letter, Aug. 5, 1882 (Parton Collection). This yacht was the one which won America's cup in England and on its return was purchased by Butler.

¹¹ Ibid., Aug. 15, 1882. ¹² T. W. Higginson to Parton, Dec. 4, 1881 (Parton Collection).

¹⁸ Idem to idem, Jan. 11, 1886.

¹⁴ Howells, Literary Friends and Acquaintance, p. 142.

You are on the road now to a vast and long reputation. Hurrah! 15

Seated about the table in his Newburyport library, Parton and his family read aloud everything Howells wrote. The biographer thought that Howells outranked all other contemporary authors and no American novelist could come anywhere near him. Each instalment was eagerly awaited, and at the conclusion of the evening's reading, there was a "groan of mortification because another month must lapse before the next Century or Harper's" would appear. In the eighties Howells had moved temporarily to New York, and Parton did not stray far from his Newburyport home. The two men saw one another infrequently, but the tie of friendship was no less close than before. Parton showed a gentle concern for Howells's every act. In reply to one of his letters, Howells wrote:

DEAR, DEAR FRIEND:

How much good your letter did me! Even now after the second reading, I want to cry over it. Thank you and all of you, with best love.

Ah! The unpossessed! I am on fire, and I must boil. But, as yet I like the boiling—and somehow, I hope to be lifted off before I begin to burn the empty brain pan. I have had a frightful year of work. . . . I must give my daughter her chance in this despicable world—where I am so much better for having had none: I must get my boy through school and into college—where I'm so much wiser for not having been! It's the pleasures and follies that we pay dearest for.

I put my sense in my work—I keep none for myself.

Yours ever,

Howells

I wish I could see you and talk with you sometimes.17

Parton replied:

My dear Boy,

I would not hear your enemy say of you what you say of yourself; but, then, you are so lavish of "sense" in your works that you may well come short when you want some for your private use. My dear, pure literature can scarcely be self-sustaining until we have international copyright. The money that Dickens and Thackeray left was not made by their writing. Until we stop stealing from the great men and great

Boston Herald, Aug. 20, 1886.

¹⁵ Parton to W. D. Howells, April 20, 1873 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library).

Howells to Parton, March 27, 1885 (Parton Collection).

women whom we pretend to love, authors should decline to descend from their garrets. I cannot recall one instance of an author who did no task or hack-work, that could safely live in the style of a prosperous grocer, unless he had property or a pension. No, not one, counting from Herodotus down. The one or two apparent exceptions prove not to be such when we get at the facts.

Your works are so thoroughly wrought out to the last comma and the last page, that they must come out of your vitals. So far, I can truly say that you show no signs of fatigue, but every sign of growth, and as long as you enjoy the boil, all is well. But, learn to be a Yankee, and admonish your son to be a miser of the New Hampshire type: "Be mercenary, boy, and rule the earth." Speak roundly to him.

Is it not horrible to think that money buys everything—even the

right to despise it, and the power to do without it?

As for me, I have no sense either in or out of my books, and have discovered the true wisdom by the want of it. If you ever hear me give forth a maxim, know, that that is the very thing I have never done and cannot do. . . .

Affectionately yours,

JAMES PARTON

Don't answer. I am going to see you soon.18

In 1888 Howells briefly contemplated moving to Newbury-port and asked Parton for advice. Parton was delighted at the prospect, described the town, sent health reports in a letter answering a question of Mrs. Howells, and made the situation as alluring as possible. Houses could be bought for under ten thousand dollars, he wrote, and in case there should be no suitable one, he offered either of his own houses to his friend. As for the town itself, Parton wrote: "It has its own flavor, its own secrets, its own long history. It differs from newer and richer towns very much as an old family differs from that of the bristling manufacturer."²⁰

Newburyport appealed to Howells as an ideal place, and he acknowledged that his "first thought in connection with Newburyport was that you and yours were there and so we would not be alone." Before the spring thaws Mr. and Mrs. Howells and their daughter set out from Boston to be guests of the Partons.

¹⁸ Parton to W. D. Howells, April 6, 1885 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library).

¹⁰ Parton to Howells, Jan. 6, 13, 19, March 8, 1888 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library). As their children grew older, the Partons found their house too small. They purchased a second house in 1885 and rented the first.

Ibid., Jan. 13, 1888.
 W. D. Howells to Parton, Jan. 14, 1888 (Parton Collection).

The town proved a disappointment, however, and there was no house that suited their requirements. They finally settled in Boston.

Parton's letters to Howells were the best he wrote. Each of the two men called forth the other's finest qualities. The former New Yorker with his realistic attitude rejoiced at the new direction Howells was giving the American novel. After the publication of A Hazard of New Fortunes his delight knew no bounds, and he observed: "New York has quickened you. My chief regret about you has been that you were not reared in New York, the only place we have which has the least flavor of a metropolis. But you have absorbed a great deal of it. It is no place to live in, but it is the only place for a career."22

Howells replied immediately, deeply sensitive to the praise Parton had so bountifully given him throughout the letter. He invited Parton to visit him and announced the death of his daughter which seemed at that moment to take all meaning out of life. As compensation, he intended to interest himself in charity work.²³ Parton's letter of sympathy was one of the last letters the novelist received from Newburyport: Parton himself was soon to pass be-

yond the shadow.

My dear Both of you-

Cling to all your hopes, say I. The very fact that we cannot make out a 'case' for immortal life may be a reason for our believing it. Beautiful truths may follow the general law of beautiful things in being irreconcilable with reason. What Yankee would think Venice a good site for a city? It is as absurd as transubstantiation, and all enchanting things founded upon absurdity—i. e., something which human reason cannot reconcile with the system of beliefs it has created. You cannot mention one exquisite thing which has not in it this quality of irreconcilableness.

Gradually, and much against my will, the expectation of another life has faded out within me. It grew out of my painful sense of our

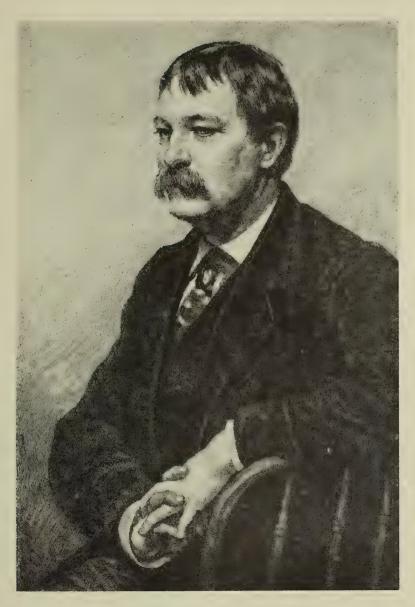
incompleteness

I could not help saying to myself: if once we get safely into the grave, can it be worth while to give us another trial? But you cannot feel so with regard to your child, and you need not and what is more, you never will. I say to my few pagan friends: when we know what life is, we shall know what death is, and not before.

What an idea—your doing Charity work! You, who do nothing ²² Parton to W. D. Howells, Dec. 30, 1889 (MS Collection, Harvard Uni-

versity Library).

28 W. D. Howells to Parton, Jan. 3, 1890 (Parton Collection).



WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS



else! In this town we have 200 Italians digging sewers. They will prevent more disease and pain than four hundred convents of picturesque nuns could assuage. There is a charity work which is not futile but it is not for you.

Thank you both for your kind invitation, which I hope some day to avail myself of. Meanwhile, when both or either of you need a change or wish to do something in the way of real charity, alight upon us and go to Church on Sunday in a Unitarian Church of the old style with high-backed pews and every inconvenience. It would give us an acute pleasure, and might be of some little service to you both.²⁴

ïV

The congeniality of the Parton family was noteworthy. Guests who came for the day, for the night, or for a longer period delighted in the radiant atmosphere they found. Hezekiah Butterworth, of the Youth's Companion, wrote Parton that "I am so sick of un-American life and imitation and what is purely pretentious and artificial, that it does me good to hear you talk and I always return to the city better equipped for my work."²⁵

Julius H. Ward, an example of that combination of clergyman and scrivener frequently found in New England, was impressed, as had been Dr. Samuel Beane of the old Free Church of Newburyport, by the absolute sincerity with which Parton expressed his beliefs and by the simple friendliness of the entire family. His note of thanks for his visit was far from perfunctory: "I can hardly explain it," he wrote, "but my call at your house made a great impression on me . . . there was such a harmony and beauty in the home life that I was wonderfully impressed by it. I don't know when I have seen so much common sense applied to the administration of a household." 26

The contentment Parton found at home in Newburyport can scarcely be overstated. Caught in the swing of New York since childhood, he enjoyed the restfulness of this New England town without a moment's regret for what he had given up. Even the family he adored might not have stayed him had this content been less genuine. He never forgot what New York had once meant to him, nor did he forget the debt he owed to its influence, but those who looked for his quick return to the city were disap-

²⁴ Parton to W. D. Howells, Jan. 5, 1890 (MS Collection, Harvard University Library).

²⁵ Hezekiah Butterworth to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).

⁶ J. H. Ward to Parton, June 21, 1889 (Parton Collection).

pointed.²⁷ Parton expressed his happiness to the Spoffords and gave Mrs. Spofford some of the credit for the move to Newburyport. She disclaimed any such honor: "[it was] *Dick* who first suggested your coming here—when I thought it preposterous to suppose that after your metropolitan life you could he happy here."²⁸

Newburyport offered richer, more intimate friendships than did New York. The Spoffords—Richard and Harriet, familiarly called Hall—were the family's oldest friends there. Mrs. Spofford was a woman of vivid charm who regarded life excitedly; her husband, equally charming, if irresponsible, was a delightful companion. These two friends, who lived on neighboring Deer Island, helped Parton maintain ties with the outside literary world.

Parton belonged to the Tuesday Night Club, a group of business and professional men, leaders in the community. The Club met each week at the home of one of the members; after supper, a paper was read and discussion followed. Parton greatly enjoyed these meetings. "One of the beneficial effects of clubs and societies," he once wrote, ". . . is in making us acquainted with other minds, and in subjecting our favorite opinions to free comment and criticism. Free and friendly intercourse with other minds, widely different from our own, is the natural remedy for crankiness."²⁹

Among Parton's fellow members of the Club was Nathan Noyes Withington, editor of the Newburyport *Herald*, an unusual newspaper for a small town, its editorials being frequently reprinted in the Boston dailies. John Currier, the historian of the town, and Elisha P. Dodge, the leading shoe manufacturer, were also members. Dr. Beane of the Unitarian Church and Dr. Daniel Fiske of the Belleville Congregational Church represented the religious element, offsetting the unorthodox Mr. Parton. Dr. Francis Howe, a physician, and Colonel Eben F. Stone, a lawyer and one-time member of Congress, were included in the congenial company.

The papers presented by these men of varied interests often led to lively debate. Sometimes the complacency of certain members irked Parton, and he reacted with a sally of criticism which

New York Commercial Advertiser, July 18, 1890.
 Harriet P. Spofford to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).
 Open Court: A Fortnightly Journal, I (April 14, 1887), 115.

would cause him worry afterwards. On one such occasion, after a heated argument with Dr. Fiske, he returned home in a state of great concern thinking that his irritation had gone too far. Running his fingers through his long hair, he muttered unhappily and was not content until he had righted matters with his friend. Parton's sincerity and gentleness endeared him to his friends, who forgave the stubbornness while they admired the courage with which he defended his opinions. When he died, the members of the Tuesday Night Club found it difficult to speak moderately of his companionship and the inspiration he had been to them in "knowledge, lively imagination, ready wit, and felicitous expression." 30

With all the members of the Tuesday Night Club and their households the Partons were on terms of warm friendship. The children of the Withingtons, the Howes, and the Curriers, of varying ages, played with the three Parton children, for Ethel at her own request had formally taken the Parton name. Jane Andrews, the teacher who wrote children's books, and her sister Emily were also favorites.

James Parton was a devoted husband and a valued neighbor. He had as great a success in these roles as he had had in the role of a distinguished guest in the salons of New York. Mrs. Spofford well said of him: "No page he ever wrote equalled his daily task at home; he spared nothing of word or thought, and to live with him was indeed a liberal education. He cultivated beauty everywhere about him, the beauty of art and nature. . . ."³¹

³⁰ Newburyport Herald, Memorial to James Parton by the Saturday Night Club, Oct., 1891. (The Tuesday Night Club merged with this club, of which Parton was a member.)

³¹ Writer, V (Nov., 1891), 233.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE FINAL YEARS

PARTON'S retirement to Newburyport did not mean that he was giving up his career as a writer; it came to mean, however,

writing for a different audience.

First on his schedule had been the completion of the Life of Voltaire. For five years except for time spent on the miscellaneous writing necessary for a livelihood, he devoted himself entirely to the study of the five hundred volumes he had collected on that subject. Bonner's Ledger paid generously for the columns he sent to New York, and for the first three years, 1874 to 1877, he did a weekly column for the New York Illustrated News. Soon after the failure of that publication he began a connection with the Youth's Companion which was to continue for the remainder of his life.

H

Parton had always understood children. While he was contributing to the Atlantic Monthly, Ticknor suggested that he write a series of historical episodes for publication in Our Young Folks. That magazine was a proud relation of the Atlantic Monthly. Much of the best writing for children in those years was first published in its pages, and its roster of contributors included many names appearing in the adult magazine. Parton's answer to the suggestion was: "When do you want to begin?" In January, 1869—the same issue in which the beginning of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's Story of a Bad Boy appeared—Parton's first article was published.2 It was called "The Mariner's Compass" and was a fascinating introduction for children, younger or older, to the history of the country. Ticknor was pleased with the contribution,3 and Parton continued to write for Our Young Folks as long as the magazine was published. After its demise, busy with many other articles and books, he made no effort to continue this sort of writing until, nearly a decade later, he was approached by the Youth's Companion.

¹ Parton to Ticknor, Sept. 17, 1868 (Parton Collection).

Our Young Folks, V (Jan., 1869).

J. T. Fields to Parton (MS Collection, Huntington Memorial Library).

The Youth's Companion needed no introduction to most Americans of that day and certainly not to the man who had first married the daughter and later the granddaughter of its founder, Nathaniel P. Willis.4 The editor listed, for Parton's benefit, many of the well-known writers who were its contributors-James T. Fields, Schuyler Colfax, Rebecca Harding Davis, and others. The letter explained its wish to have "graphic pictures of the turning points in life's moral history." For such a "strong stereoscopic incident," it offered one hundred dollars a column or fifty dollars for an article half that length.⁵ Parton accepted the offer, suggested topics, and sent trial manuscripts. The editor wrote at once: "Please excuse the insistence, if so it seems, but your articles are so adapted to our wants, and the subjects you have named so promising that you would do us a kind favor by sending other manuscripts soon."6 In addition to these essays, the Companion asked for "brief articles of current comment," which they admitted they could not pay for at the paper's higher rates but for which they asked the author to set his own price.7

In the first year Parton's association with the Youth's Companion resulted in only a few articles, but these were well chosen, and whatever he wrote was readily accepted. By chance, early in 1880 when the chief problems in connection with the publishing of his Life of Voltaire were out of the way, the Youth's Companion suggested that he write one article a month of 1,500 to 2,500 words suitable for illustration and supply two short articles weekly for use as "editorial paragraphs, one of which shall relate to schools, reading, study, etc. . . . of not more than 400 words each." For such work he was offered \$1,200 a year. Thus Parton became a contributing editor of the Youth's Companion.

The Youth's Companion was then in the heyday of its hundred years' existence. Ten years earlier Daniel Ford had acquired complete control of the paper; he sent it skyrocketing to success. What contributed as much as anything else to the Youth's Companion's popularity was its policy of catering to the whole family. This publication, which refused to countenance such things as love interest in its story plots, significantly found its greatest popularity in regions west of Boston and in communities throughout the United States where strict moral standards were unaffected

⁴ See Mott, op. cit., II, 262-274, for an excellent account of this magazine.
⁵ Perry Mason and Company to Parton, Jan. 9, 1879 (Parton Collection).

⁶ Idem to idem, April 11, 1879 (Parton Collection).

⁷ Idem to idem, April 26, 1879 (Parton Collection).

⁸ Idem to idem, Feb. 4, 1880 (Parton Collection).

^o Mott, op. cit., II, 268.

by the sophistication of urban life.10 For its million readers the distinction of the magazine lay in its long list of special writers; to name Theodore Roosevelt and Lord Gladstone, Tennyson and Longfellow, Huxley and Beecher is to mention a few of the famous men who lent luster to its pages.

II

The subjects on which Parton wrote were of wide range. "Presidential Campaigns," "The History of Fireworks," "The Cause of Dickens' Early Death" are titles chosen more or less at random from the list of his longer contributions. His brief editorial paragraphs included all sorts of topics from "After-Dinner Stories" to "Helps to an Education."11 Throughout his association with the magazine he gave valued editorial advice, one of the happiest being a plan to ask our foreign consuls for contributions to the Companion.12

The "regularity, promptness, and excellence" of his work gave his editors satisfaction and prompted the wish that their other authors might be "equally exact and conscientious." When his one-year agreement ended, Perry Mason-the trade name of the editorial office—hastened to assure him that the magazine wished to continue his contributions and asked that in the future he send one long and one short paragraph for the editorial columns each week, not forgetting the longer articles when the inspiration moved him. They considered the short paragraphs best, though they assured him the monthly essays would be used almost without fail.14 Parton's knowledge of the reader's taste never deserted him. The Companion wrote: "You certainly understand the younger quite as well as you do the older readers."15

James Parton seldom visited the Boston offices of the Youth's Companion. Hezekiah Butterworth, their editorial representative, went out to Newburyport and transacted whatever business was necessary. Ethel Parton, even before her graduation from the Putnam Free School, had assisted her uncle in various ways. Under his tutelage, she wrote an article much in the biographer's

Literature, XXI (March 25, 1940), 3.

11 Letters to Parton from Perry Mason (or Hezekiah Butterworth), Feb. 8, 1880, March 17, 1880, etc.; also many undated letters (Parton Collection).

¹⁰ M. A. DeW. Howe, "You Used to Read It, Too," Saturday Review of

¹² Idem to idem, May 17, 1880 (Parton Collection). 13 Idem to idem, Aug. 9, 1880 (Parton Collection). 14 Idem to idem, May 5, 1881 (Parton Collection). 16 Idem to idem (ca. 1881) (Parton Collection).

style and submitted it for publication. Both rejoiced at its acceptance. When next Butterworth came to Newburyport, Parton told of his niece's work and thereby secured favorable consideration for the young woman so well schooled by her uncle. After Parton's death Daniel Ford invited Miss Parton to submit further work, which resulted in her having a long connection with the publication as a regular writer.

Ш

In addition to the constant stream of articles he sent to the Youth's Companion from 1880 to 1891, Parton also found time for regular semi-weekly contributions to Robert Bonner's Ledger. These two publications received the major portion of his writing in the last ten years of his life, though he also contributed to the Forum, the American Magazine of History, and lesser known periodicals. There was little reason to burn himself out on longer work, since he knew that Bonner in New York and Butterworth in Boston would take everything he might do. His reputation as a biographer and journalist of course was well established. Appleton commissioned him to do the accounts of Burr and Jackson for the Cyclopaedia of American Biography; he was paid twenty-five dollars for the Burr and seventy-five for the Jackson.¹⁸

From time to time Parton was requested to undertake longer biographies, but he felt unable to attempt these tasks. Books, however, continued to bear his name on their title pages. The collections of short *Ledger* biographies were reprinted to good advantage. Four such books were published.¹⁹ They were similar in plan to the two volumes he had edited between 1869 and 1870 and, like these, were published by subscription in order to make sure of returns. With the aid of fellow writers of the *Youth's Companion*, Parton edited *Some Noted Princes*, *Authors and Statesmen of Our Time*.²⁰ In 1884 he collected some of his

¹⁶ Conversations with Miss Ethel Parton.

¹⁷ Ethel Parton became a well-known author of children's books, several of which were chosen as Junior Literary Guild selections. One series dealt with early life in Newburyport.

early life in Newburyport.

18 Appleton Company to Parton, April 24, 1886 (Parton Collection). This amounted to better pay than any other contributor received, the usual rate being five dollars a page.

These four titles were: People's Book of Biography: or Short Lives of the Most Interesting Persons of All Ages and Countries (New York, 1868); Great Men and Their Achievements: or The People's Book of Biography (New York, 1881); Noted Women of Europe and America: Authors, Artists, Reformers—from the most recent and authentic sources (Hartford, 1883); Daughters of Genius (Philadelphia, 1887).

²⁰ James Parton (ed.), Some Noted Princes, Authors and Statesmen of Our Time (New York, 1885).

own Youth's Companion columns; the book was issued by his regular publishers, Houghton Mifflin Company, under the title Captains of Industry, with the subtitle, Men of Business Who Did Something Besides Making Money.²¹ This was the first of two such books; a second series was issued with the same title seven years later.²² A few historical sketches written for various periodicals were grouped together under the titles Revolutionary Heroes and Colonial Pioneers and published by another firm.²³ These proved admirable material for schools as did the Captains of Industry, which later formed a part of Houghton Mifflin's Riverside School Library.

ΙV

Partly because the lecture system was on the wane and partly because he preferred to keep close to Newburyport, Parton now did little lecturing, but until the time of his death he lectured each year in some part of New England. He continued to be an adherent of the Free Thought movement, though he no longer took part in its councils. The last convention he attended was at Albany in 1885. His pen, however, was always at the service of the Free Thinkers Magazine, and he supplied something of the restraint and good temper which that periodical so much needed. In an article entitled "Labor Cranks,"24 he warned that bad cranks could do a great deal of harm. John Brown, he said, for example, may have stood for an ideal, but his acts in pursuit of that ideal made temperate discussions of slavery impossible. He cautioned against wholesale condemnation of capitalists who, he felt, in the main performed efficient service and among whom were some of "the best and ablest people we have." In the same article, however, Parton urged that the right of bequest be limited, that absentee landlords be taxed, and that the bad conditions in manufacturing towns be remedied.

The editor, T. B. Wakeman, replied to Parton's article, accusing the capitalist cranks of making it impossible for the radicals to accomplish anything by constitutional and legal methods. The crusading fire of Parton's earlier years, he went on, had burned itself out; the writer's tolerance of capitalists lay in Parton's easy life in the conservative town to which he had retired.

²¹ Captains of Industry (Boston, 1884).

²² Captains of Industry, Second Series, 1891. ²³ Revolutionary Heroes and Colonial Pioneers (New York, 1890). ²⁴ Free Thinkers Magazine, V (July, 1887), 333.

v

Parton actively identified himself with the best interests of the town of Newburyport.²⁵ He served faithfully and zealously as a member of the School Committee and frequently appeared in the schoolroom to give a brief talk or, on some important occasion, an address. He also served as a director of the public library.

Only once did he aspire to office. The neglected condition of the commons was a sore trial to this lover of neatness and beauty. Remembering the Village Improvement Societies of Stockbridge and Lenox, he attempted to form such a group. He was elected Keeper of the Public Lands, and in that capacity, too, he did his town good service.

With advancing years, trips to the city of his youth became less frequent. New York seemed farther and farther away. In 1885 he attended the celebration of the eightieth birthday of David Dudley Field and briefly rejoiced again in the activity he had known, calling on friends and seeing all the theater productions he could fit into his New York visit.²⁶ A year or two later on another trip he took his son Hugo with him, proudly introducing him to old acquaintances and initiating him into the wonders of the metropolis. In spite of his removal to Newburyport, Parton had kept in close touch with his old friends and his old clubs in New York—the Twilight Club, devoted to good fellowship and "rational recreation," the Manhattan Liberal Club, and the Civil Service Reform Association.²⁷

Shortly after his Life of Franklin was published, Parton, then a resident of New York, had been elected a corresponding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society—a special membership awarded distinguished out-of-state gentlemen. After his removal to Newburyport, he could no longer qualify, as active membership was limited to a hundred Massachusetts citizens. Colonel Higginson tried to enter Parton's name. Cabot Lodge and Leverett Saltonstall were willing enough to have his name put up at the earliest opportunity, and Higginson expected others would fall in line.²⁸ But the opening did not come soon, and when it did, the committee was reported afraid to try his name. "After a few

Boston Herald, Aug. 20, 1886.

Family letters, 1885 (Parton Collection).
Miscellaneous letters (Parton Collection).

²⁸ T. W. Higginson to Parton, April 11, 1880 (Parton Collection).

first-class funerals, you'll be admitted," Higginson hoped.²⁹ Parton never was voted into active membership. Other honors did come, however, among them an honorary A.M. degree conferred

by Williams College in 1887.30

Parton never ceased to be intensely interested in the reform of American democratic procedure. But in many ways he felt the people had shirked their responsibilities. The New York World quoted him as saying: "I do not think that in recent years we have set the example to the world that we ought to have set... Were we all that we should be, how could our example be resisted? What a sun we should be among the nations of the world." Reform could be accomplished in only one way: "It will not be done without a long and passionate struggle. We must make a religion out of it." ³²

VI

Life in the Parton household, whether in the first house they occupied or in the larger brown clapboard one to which they moved in 1885, continued to be happy. The author worked continuously and methodically, though at any signal of overwork he slowed his pace.³³ Parton usually spent his mornings reading or writing, and after a one o'clock dinner he devoted himself to his family, his acre of ground, or simply to relaxation.³⁴ When, in 1887, his editors asked him for his probable summer address, he answered:

I hope to stay at home all the summer, working in the morning, gardening in the afternoon, hearing something nice read in the evening. I may roam around a little, but, for me there is no place like home.³⁵

In 1887 Ethel Parton went to Europe with a small group of friends including Anne Withington, daughter of Nathan N. Withington, the local newspaper editor. Throughout the summer Parton wrote Ethel the little doings of Newburyport. The news was often an inconsequential bit about the town or the school; he

34 Boston Herald, loc. cit.

²⁰ Idem to idem, April 9, 1881. ³⁰ Diploma (Parton Collection). ³¹ New York World, May 12, 1889.

³² Chicago Times, Jan. 18, 1875. Report of Parton's lecture, "Our Scandalous Politics."

³⁸ New York Commercial Advertiser, July 18, 1890.

⁸⁵ Parton to Robert Bonner, May 21, 1887 (MS Division, New York Public Library).



Ellen Eldredge Parton and Her Children, 1881



wrote, for example, about the examinations and the stack of papers he was reading as judge for the Tappen Prize, or he wrote of buying a present for a teacher:

A whole gang of us went down-town to select the present for Miss Pettigrew (Mabel's teacher). We bought a really nice handbag of black leather, into which I slipped six handkerchiefs, nicely worked, which Mabel said were the right thing. The presentation is to take place the day of the examination. I treated the whole crowd to ice-cream and rides. On the same occasion we laid in our stock of Fourth of July torments—a whole box of firecrackers and other things in proportion.³⁶

Parton took the greatest delight in his children. With his boy Hugo he became one of the town's most loyal rooters of the Newburyport ball team. Even Olympic games, he thought, could hardly be "so graceful, so innocent, so healthful as our baseball." Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia did not contain mention of the sport, and he expressed his indignation over this serious omission. Rossiter Johnson, the publisher, replied that they considered the subject classed with "our national vices rather than our national pastimes." Parton considered it otherwise. Almost as soon as Hugo could throw a ball, the father was pitching with his son or playing "scrub." 39

VII

James Parton had always had a weak heart which reacted unfavorably to any long period of stress or strain, and the tax he had put upon himself in his busiest years had told upon his slight frame. He fought it as best he could, for he believed that to be sick was in some measure immoral, but he became increasingly a prey to fatigue. Mentally he was as alert as ever, and it was the more annoying to be physically unfit.

In the last few months of his life Parton was aware of his own decline. Quietly, with no word of his suspicions, he tried to plan the future for his family, and especially for Ethel, who had come to an age where she might strike out for herself in the field of journalism.

Not until a few weeks before his death did the family know they were soon to lose the devoted husband and father. One night

³⁶ Parton to Ethel Parton, June 26, 1887 (Parton Collection).

³⁷ Boston Herald, op. cit.

²⁸ Rossiter Johnson to Parton, April 12, 1885 (Parton Collection).

³⁹ Boston Herald, op. cit.

the Partons were gathered as was their custom in the library. Mrs. Parton sat sewing, and while her husband lay on the couch Ethel read aloud Frank Stockton's story "The Squirrel Inn." It was an amusing piece, but the family remembered it as one of the saddest of stories. For the first time Parton was too tired to listen, and the rest sensed their coming loneliness. The story was never finished.⁴⁰

Only the final days were spent in bed, and few of the neighbors were aware of the fatal nature of Parton's illness. Until the end he was conscious, and lying in bed he smiled cheerfully or spoke reassuringly as the family came and went. On October 17,

1891, he passed away in his sleep.

The funeral was held from his home, and the last rites were simple and impressive. A eulogy was read by the Reverend Samuel Beane, of the Unitarian Church, which Parton and his family had in later years attended. The minister, a warm and intimate friend, dwelt upon his simplicity and sensibility, his unfaltering love of truth. "To him his home was more than the wealth of a kingdom . . .," he asserted. "Never was a man more modest concerning his own wants and deserts. . . . His religion was to do good. His worship was the adoration of great truths and noble characters."

Newspapers in this country and in England wrote obituaries of Parton as essayist, biographer, and journalist. The London Telegraph, writing of his death, praised his Atlantic essays and his biographies, and especially his Andrew Jackson as "undoubtedly one of the most thrilling narratives that America has yet produced." The Youth's Companion shattered precedent by mentioning at length in their editorial column the passing of this valued staff member and contributor. 43

His death to those who knew him was the death of a friend; to those who knew him as a writer, it was the end of the vivid and colorful writing they had come to expect from him; to those who were radical crusaders, it was the passing of a distinguished ally on whose courage they could always rely.

40 As told the writer by Ethel Parton.

⁴² London Telegraph, Oct. 27, 1891. ⁴³ Youth's Companion, clipping (Parton Collection). It is interesting that such diverse publications as the Health Monthly (Nov., 1891) and the Christian Union (1891), p. 977, noted his death with regret.

⁴¹ Address of Dr. Samuel Beane at the services (Newburyport Herald, Oct. 21, 1891).

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JAMES PARTON: THE MAN AND HIS WORK

JAMES PARTON had an easy explanation for his success—"Toil! Toil! "I He was well aware that any writer must have a "devouring rage" to write, that "excellence in literature is only obtained by time . . . and excellence in literature does not pay." When asked about writing as a career, his first impulse was to say, "Oh, don't," but the words were drowned by the immense love he felt for his art.²

Financially, he did well and became the first writer of high standing to maintain himself decently by means of writing alone.³ Even so, it was his lectures which paid for his ambitious work on Voltaire and gave him surcease from strenuous labor in his last years. One of the lessons he learned in mid-career was that there were many different audiences for whom one might write. He was confident that writing for Bonner's Ledger or the Youth's Companion was as honorable as writing for the Atlantic or the North American Review. He also pointed out that men like Bonner were rare editors who "could estimate brain work at something like its proper value in currency." There was no intellectual snobbery in Parton's choice of magazines, but he allowed anecdotal writing which required little effort to supplant the literary and scholarly workmanship of his earlier period.

Parton in his later years was convinced that "the most gifted and enlightened journalists must of necessity write to order." The world had veered, he thought, from the day of the individual to a newer age dominated wholly by business. The press itself, he wrote, no longer held the influential position it commanded in the days of Bryant, Greeley, and Bennett, and the direction of it had become primarily a financial matter. To Parton, journalism

Boston Evening Tribune, Oct. 19, 1891.

² Boston Herald, Aug. 20, 1886.

^a National Cyclopaedia of Biography, I, 392.

Boston Herald, loc. cit.

⁵ Writer, II (May, 1888), 103.

⁶ T. W. Barnes, *Memoir of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1884), p. 556. Parton's greetings to Weed on his eighty-third birthday are quoted.

seemed more and more "a huge fence for the posting of bills."7

He had become increasingly tired; his own success had been compounded out of hardships. The two millstones—"the work we want to do and the work we have to do"—seemed to him to revolve in opposite directions, grinding writers like him to pieces. Could he have lived his life over, he first would have sought an independent income and then taken up the work he loved."

П

Parton ranks high both as journalist and craftsman. His ideas were sound, his instincts good. "To talk with him an hour... was to obtain suggestions that would last a month for one engaged in daily editorial writing," one of his friends commented. Hezekiah Butterworth of the Youth's Companion appreciated this when he wrote:

I often repeat three things that you have said to me about writing and editing—

"Always keep in the direction of the largest audience."
"As far as possible, please the imagination of the people."

"Always remember that two thirds of the people are women and children."

"A Paper will fill as large an audience as the people who want it, or need it." 10

In 1888 Alfred R. Conkling asked Parton for professional advice in the preparation of a life of his father, Roscoe Conkling. Refusing to sell such help, Parton generously outlined, in eight letters, his own rules for the writing of biography. After his death the letters were published, and they are of as much value now as they were at the time they were given to the public.

In the first of the letters, Parton wrote:

The great charm of all biography is the truth, told simply, directly,

boldly, charitably.

But this is also the great difficulty. A human life is long. A human character is complicated. It is often inconsistent with itself, and it requires nice judgment to proportion it in such a way as to make the book really correct with the man, and make the same impression upon those who knew him best.

Boston Herald, loc. cit. See also the Writer, II (May, 1888).

⁹ New England Magazine, N.S., VII, 634.

⁸ Philadelphia Public Ledger, Jan. 1 (?), clipping (Parton Collection).

¹⁰ Hezekiah Butterworth to Parton, n.d. (Parton Collection).

Your difficulty will be to present fairly his less favorable side: but upon this depends all the value, and much of the interest of the work. My great rules are:

1. To know the subject thoroughly myself.

2. To index fully all knowledge in existence relating to it.

3. To determine before hand where I will be brief, where expand, and how much space I can afford to each part.

4. To work slowly and finish as I go.

5. To avoid eulogy and apology and let the facts have their natural weight.

6. To hold back nothing which the reader has a right to know.

I have generally had the great advantage of loving my characters warmly, and I do not believe we can do justice to any human creature unless we love him. A true love enlightens, but not blinds, as we often see in the case of mothers who love their children better, and also know them better, than anybody else ever does.¹¹

In a later letter Parton emphasized that a writer must never lose his sense of proportion. Remember, he wrote, that "the art is to be short where the interest is small, and long where the interest is great." ¹²

Parton, like all others interested in good government, viewed Conkling's career with regret as injurious to the cause of civil service reform. When the son's biography was published, he acknowledged the value the book might have for future writers but continued: "You must not expect the public to remain satisfied with the omissions and suppressions of your book. Sooner or later, somebody will supply them and you might just as well have told the whole story."

Parton never evaded the truth. His philosophy is reflected in a letter to George Bancroft, who had sent Parton a pamphlet entitled George Reed: A Historical Essay, exposing misstatements made in another account. "There is a time to forebear, and there is a time to hit out from the shoulder," he wrote. "As a general thing, we are too mild and forgiving. We are so afraid of being savage, that we are apt to be soft." 14

Parton's admiration for his subjects gave them vitality. In general, he believed a sympathetic approach was conducive to good biography. He did not conceal his subjects' faults, but he cau-

¹¹ McClure's Magazine, I (June, 1893), 59-60. Letter dated Dec. 8, 1888.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 60. Letter of March 26, 1889. ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 62. Letter of Dec. 28, 1889.

¹⁴ Parton to George Bancroft, June 4, 1867 (Massachusetts Historical Society Collection).

tioned against unnecessary and curious delving into the lives of living people. "If we ask a public benefactor to sit for his portrait," he thought, "we should not deny him the privilege of brushing his hair and arranging his cravat, before going to the photographers."15 When a subject's character could not stand keen scrutiny or lacked personal appeal for the writer, Parton gave up the idea of portraying him.16

The portraits James Parton painted in his biographies were vivid ones. The background against which the figures stood was sometimes too lightly limned, sometimes out of focus, but there was always a full-length rendering of a man. His talent for giving life to the mass of materials which he had uncovered through infinite patience is apparent to any reader of his works. His mind had many facets. He was an outstanding reporter of his period, a stimulating lecturer, tireless in his defense of the individual, and a fighter for freedom of thought. But his importance as the originator of a new kind of American biography overshadows his other contributions.

Parton invariably called himself a "pagan"; yet in his life he manifested with ever deepening emphasis the attributes of charity, patience, and human sympathy which are ordinarily supposed to belong only to those who are religious. Inextricably, the man and his writings were bound together. In no biography that he wrote did he fail to communicate his admiration for whatever was admirable in his characters; in no smallest essay did he fail to exhibit the sterling merit of good craftsmanship. He himself exemplified the truth of the words he once wrote Howells: "A genuine artist is a preacher of righteousness, practicing it in his own work, as well as by exhibiting it in his characters." For such reasons both the figure and the work of James Parton emerge large and distinct from the shadows of time.

16 James Parton (ed.), Some Noted Princes, Authors, and Statesmen of Our

Time, p. v.

16 There were many public men whose lives Parton did not write, not from lack of appreciation but from lack of time and energy. Among those whose lives he was asked to write and did not were John C. Fremont (J. B. Fremont to Parton, Jan. 9, 1874), Charles Sumner (J. R. Osgood to Parton, March 19, 1874), John Brown (Redpath to Parton, March 8, 1867), and Martin Van Buren (J. T. Morse to Parton, Feb. 16, 1883). All these letters are in the Parton Collection.

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The richest source of material for this book has been the collection of family papers in the possession of James Parton, grandson of the biographer. These files contain a wealth of data, including family letters, newspaper clippings, a scrapbook of James Parton's first writings, old notebooks in which the author made copious notes for his projected works, and several hundred letters from other people to Parton, which have illuminated the activities and given much information on the biographer's interests and friendships. The whole collection presents a wide range of invaluable records of the biographer and his literary friends.

Further manuscript material has been obtained from these depositories:

New York Public Library, Manuscript Division.

Especially rich in the Greeley and Bonner Collections.

Harvard University Library, Treasure Room.

Howells Collection, and some twenty-odd letters by Parton to various people.

Henry Huntington Memorial Library, Manuscript Room.

Forty letters, James Parton to James Fields, also two to Francis Lieber. Boston Public Library, Manuscript Room.

About twenty-five letters of James Parton.

Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

Library of Congress.

Pennsylvania Historical Society Library, Philadelphia.

These each contain a few useful items.

Other libraries have been consulted, but have proved barren in Parton materials or possess items irrelevant to this work.

I am further indebted to the late Ethel Parton of Newburyport, Massachusetts, whose interest, both in conversation and letters, was of inestimable aid. On innumerable points she clarified my problems and made every effort to see that I obtained full and unvarnished information on my subject. Other collateral descendants of James Parton, Mrs. A. M. Bumann and Mrs. Will Rainey, have shown genealogical material, family letters, and an old "Sentiment Album" once belonging to Ann Parton.

The late Dr. Clifton Joseph Furness generously permitted me to quote from his manuscript "Life of Walt Whitman." Two other manuscripts used have been master's theses by Mae Weintraub Zlotnick on "Fanny Fern" (Columbia University) and Frederic D. Slater's "Life and Letters of Mortimer 'Doesticks' Thomson" (Northwestern University).

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APPENDICES

- I. Tentative bibliography of James Parton for the Life of Aaron Burr
- II. Letters from W. B. Lewis to James Parton on the Life of Andrew Jackson
- III. Letter of Henry S. Randall to James Parton on Jefferson and the "Dusky Sally Story"
- IV. The Parton-Whitman Controversy Continued



I. TENTATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF JAMES PARTON FOR THE LIFE OF AARON BURR

One volume of Burr notes remains in the Parton Collection. This notebook in its first pages has a tentative bibliography and list of persons whom James Parton intended to interview. Those Burr associates whom the author consulted for recollections are not all recorded. The completed biography gives quotations from unnamed sources, letter files yield further consultants, and the loss of other Parton notebooks restricts our knowledge of the checkmarks before his catalogue of persons to be interviewed. Parton referred to his subject as "Gamp."

Notebook marked "Gamp," 1855

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Hosack's Memoir of DeWitt Clinton

Gov. Livingston's Eulogy of Rev. Aaron Burr in Mass. Hist. Soc. Library at Boston

Journal of Col. Meigs. (Canada, Europe?)

Hickey's Constitution (Pres. Canvasses)

Fifty Years in both Hemispheres—by Vincent Nolte (Redfield) (mentions and describes Burr)

Events of Fifty Years by John Barney

Gibb's Work

The History of Don Francisco de Miranda's attempt to affect a Revolution in S. America. Boston, 1810

Journals of the Senate from fall of 1791 to ----

A letter from Alex. Hamilton concerning the public character and condition of John Adams

Evening Post, July 19, 1802

The American Citizen Newspaper for Oct. 1802

Life of DeWitt Clinton

Eager's Hist of Orange County (N. Y.)

Trial of Judge Chase

Journal of a tour in Unsettled parts of North America in 1796 and 1797 by Francis Bailey F.R.S.

Rev. A. Burr's Funeral Sermon by Rev. Caleb Smith in N. Y. Hist. Soc. Lib.

Dumont's Bentham translated by John Neal

Life of N. Clay-He was Burr's Counsel in Kentucky

Recollections of the last Sixty Years, by J. Johnson of Piqua, Ohio Watson's Historic Tales of N. Y.

Hist. of Tenn., if any

Martin's Louisiana (Vol. II)

Jeff's Message-Dec. 16, 1806

Jeff's Message-Jan. 22, 1807

Hist. of Ohio

Martin's Louisiana

Memorials of Princeton by Dr. Archibald Alexander

Diary in Europe

Life by M. L. Davis
(Some work of Jonas Burrington)

Trial

Life of Blennerhassett by-

Life of Jonathan Edwards

Notes on Duels

Coleman's Collection (Duels)

Life of Henry Clay (Slights Gamp)

Life of Albert Gallatin

Life of W. Wirt

Life of A. Hamilton

Life of Washington

Life of Randolph

Gov. Plummer's Autobiography

Gayane's Hist. of Louisiana

Pickett's Hist. of Alabama (Capture)

Wallace's Blennerhassett

Griswold's Republican Court

Article on Parties in Putnam's Mag. 1854

Vallentine's Manual 1855

Life of Jay

Life of Rufus King

"The Prospect Before Us," a pamphlet by Callender about 1800

The British Spy by W. Wirt, 1800

The Federalist, by Jay and Hamilton

Gen. Wilkinson's Memoirs

Daniel Clark's ditto

Life of Joseph Reed, of Phila.

Life of Chas. Lee, Sparks

Life of Gouverneur Morris, Sparks

Lossing's Field Book of Rev.

Hammond's Hist. of Political Parties in N. Y.

Gibb's Federal Administrations

Randolph's Jefferson

Gen. Wilkinson's "Memoirs of My own Times"

Wharton's State Trials, During Adm. of Washington and Adams Austin's Life of Gerry. Gates Cabal Mme. Riedesel's Letters and Memoirs trans. by M. de Wallenstein. See Sparks, vi, 94

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Col. Knapp's Life of A. Burr

-Dr. Bowrings Memoir of Jeremy Bentham

An Examination of various charges against A.D., Esq. by Aristides

?Wranatt's Memoirs

-Cheetham's None letters on A. B.'s polit. defection

Graydon's Memoirs

A view of the Political Conduct of A. B. Esq., N. Y. 1802

Geo. Selwyn's Letter on Memoirs

Jesse's Cor. of Geo. Selwyn

Duer's Life of Lord Sterling

Hazard's Register

Doc. placed in a N.O. Notary office by one Keene

PERSONS TO BE CONSULTED

/Dr. Spring U. B. Astor

Bancroft

Man who attended Gamp till death

/Chas. King

Martin Van Buren

Grant Thoburn

Mme Jumel

/Nelson Chase

Pierpont Edwards

Judge Ogden Edwards, Care G. G. Waters, 22 William St., N. Y.

Samuel Swartout

Platt N. Crosby. Studied law with Gamp. Was at Collins Hotel, last year, 71 W. 38th St., N. Y.

Judge Minor Botts of Richmond, Va.

Thurlow Weed

/Dr. James Alexander, N. Y.

Miss Theo. Prevost, Hackensack, N. J.

Dr. Carnahan, Princeton: lives at edge of Cemetary [sic]

Alfred Edwards, brother of Judge Ogden Edwards

Mrs. Webb, formerly Newton

PLACES TO BE VISITED

Elizabethtown Northampton Richmond Goshen, N. Y.

Princeton

Blennerhassetts Island

Notations in this one volume on people actually interviewed

"Saw Mrs. Platt Crosby who knew Burr all his life—"
Mrs. Joshua Webb (Knew him aged four—cried throughout interview)

Lt. Gen. Scott—present during the Grand Army Trial Miss Provost

Mr. Celson, thru Mr. Dyer

Chas. King, D.D.

II. LETTERS FROM W. B. LEWIS TO JAMES PARTON ON THE LIFE OF ANDREW JACKSON

A

Nashville, Sept. 9th, 1859

My DEAR MR. PARTON,

It is likely that you have long since come to the conclusion that your pump has lost its power, as it has failed as yet, to bring out anything with which to quench your thirst for certain informations. It has been long coming, I confess, but still I don't intend that you shall be altogether disappointed. I did not suppose you wanted it for immediate use and did not, therefore, think it necessary to hurry myself. Besides being much occupied with my farming operations, I have been so prostrated, physically and mentally, by the intensely hot weather this summer, I have found it almost impossible to do anything. But, thanks to a kind Providence, we have at this time, very fine, as well as very comfortable weather, and I will now endeavor to obey the calls of your pump.

In the first place you desire to know a little more about Col. Burr's letter—who had it—how did he get it—for what purpose was it shown to me—what effect did it have upon my mind—had I thought of the

General's running before I saw it, &c, &c.

The letter was shown to me by a well known character in Washington, by the name of Ned Wyer, who was a native of Boston, and had been a Lieut. in the Navy: but, having been left a fortune by some deceased relative, he quit the Navy, played the part of a gentleman for a few years, and by that time discovered he had made a great mistake in resigning his commission, as he had pretty well got thro' his means. He was a very amiable, obliging, well disposed person, however, and had attached to himself a great many friends who were disposed to assist him, and did assist him, for at the time of his death, (some 15 or twenty years ago) he was sergeant at arms of the Senate. This was the man who showed me Col. Burr's letter, but as it had been confided to him, he said, with directions not to let it be known from whose hands he received it, he was not authorized to give me the name of the gentleman, nor did he do so, tho' I thought it came from some member of the So. Carolina delegation in Congress-it may not have been, but that was my impression, made probably, from the circumstance of Wyer's being very intimate and friendly with the members of that delegation, and from the fact, also, that Gov. Alston, Burr's son in law, was a citizen of that State. It was shown to me to satisfy me that Col. Burr was among the first who thought of bringing out the General as a candidate for the presidency, and had actually taken steps in the furtherance of that object. The letter, however, was not shown to me until some three or four years after the Genl had been elected—It has been spoken of during the canvass, but never published, I think, nor had a copy of it been shown to General Jackson, or his friends in this State, so far as my recollection serves me.—I know the Genl had no knowledge of it but what was acquired from the newspapers, for I enquired of him particularly, pending (?) the canvass, when great efforts were making (?) by his enemies to connect him with Burr's

Conspiracy as it was called.

The Genl. was not personally unfriendly to Col. Burr, but I am confident he had nothing to do with his movements, in the West and South, and his friends resolutely resisted the attempts of his enemies to connect him with them with the hope doubtless, of making him as odious to the country as Burr himself had been made by Mr. Jefferson and his friends. But the attempt was a signal failure—the times and circumstances had undergone a great change, since Jefferson's day, but the Genl's enemies had not the sagacity to see it. I do not believe myself, nor did I ever believe, that Col. Burr entertained any idea of dismembering the Union, or projects, of any kind, of a treasonable nature against the Government-What he proposed to do, had he succeeded, would probably have been a violation of our neutrality laws, as I have no doubt his object was a descent upon Mexico-instead of being a Traitor, he was nothing more than what would, in these days, be called a great Fillibuster! Possibly, if he had not have been interrupted, after collecting his forces and concentrating them in the neighborhood of New Orleans, before he left he might have borrowed of the banks, and other capitalists of that city, a few hundred thousand dollars, and chartered as many sailing vessels, if to be found there, as would have been sufficient to transport his men and munitions of war across the Gulph to some point on the Mexican Shore! And this, in my opinion, would have been the head and front of his offending, even if he had been successful in his projects.

Be that however as it may, Genl Jackson's friends did not believe that he was in any way connected with any of his projects, or schemes, or designs, of whatever nature they might be, and they even, therefore, determined that he should not be made responsible, in any way for them. When Col. Burr visited this part of the country he was received and treated by Genl. Jackson with civility and hospitality just as he would have done any other acquaintance of high character and distinc-

tion.

The letter that was shown to me by my friend, Ned Wyer, was undoubtedly *genuine* for I recognized the handwriting as Burr's the moment I put my eye upon it. What has become of it I know not,

but if his son in law is still living (I do not remember to have heard of his death) I presume he has it. The Memoir I write, in relation to the manner of bringing out General Jackson, as a candidate for the presidency, and which I showed to you when in Nashville, has an allusion to the same letter, but which probably has escaped your recollection—at least I should judge so from the nature of some of your interrogations. I am sorry that I have not been able to get hold of the publication made by the Nashville Jackson Committee in 1827 or -28, in relation to the supposed connection between Genl Jackson and Burr, with regard to the projects of the latter, &c. I regret it because I think that address would throw much light upon these subjects-more than my memory will enable me to do, after a lapse of more than thirty years-I regret it also, because I think some others of the publications made by that committee, would be useful to you. Altho I have looked everywhere in town for them, still I am not without hope of getting them yet, as I have lately heard that there is a file of old newspapers in the country, a few miles from Nashville, in which it is possible they

In the next place you express a desire that I shall write out the statement that I made to you verbally, when you were at my house last winter, of the break between Genl Jackson and Mr. Calhoun. This I will endeavor to do; Indeed I have already been making arrangements to do so, by looking over some of my old letters, and collecting a few documents that may be necessary to explain some of the circumstances relating to it. You may therefore rely upon its being forthcoming, and not very long either. I should like to get a document from New Orleans, which I desired to use in drawing up my statement, but I do not know whether I shall be able to get it, as I have made two applications for it, and it has not yet been sent to me, tho' it has been promised—It may reach me, perhaps, some day, between now and Christmas!

I find the papers are still disputing about the birthplace of the General. How Silly—Do those people suppose that he did not know where he was born? His mother certainly knew, and as her son Andrew was some 15 or 16 years old at the time of her death, can anyone believe, for a moment, that she never made known to him, in all that time, the place of his birth! Such a supposition is, to mind, perfectly ridiculous. The General has himself repeatedly declared that he was born in So. Carolina. He authorized Major Reid, his aidecamp from the beginning of the war of 1812 to the end of it, when writing his life, to say that he was born in So. Carolina. Again, he himself states, in his Proclamation addressed to the Nullifiers of So. Carolina, that he is a native of that state, and I know that he always claimed to be a native of it—I also know that he read every word, carefully, that was written in Reid's biography of himself, and if he was not born in So.

Carolina, as stated by his aidecamp, he would certainly have had it corrected. The information you obtained when in No. and So. Carolina last winter, I have no doubt, is substantially correct, and is the same I presume, that was published in the National Intelligencer last Spring by a gentleman living in the neighborhood of his birthplace, (I forget his name) and says, I think, he was born in the house of Mr. Crawford who had married a sister of his mother. I know that the Genl had relations by that name-indeed I saw a cousin of his by that name, who was superintending a plantation he had established on the Tennessee river at the head of Muscle Shoals, in the fall of 1818, and I thought he had a striking resemblance of the General. I cut out the article referred to as being in the Intelligencer, and intended to enclose it to you, but it has got mislaid and I cannot now lay my hand on it, tho' I dare say you saw it. But I have another, also taken from the Intelligencer, which you will find enclosed herewith, and which I think is a very interesting document, or paper. It was written as you will perceive, by Josiah F. Polk and by him sent to the Intelligencer to be published. The story he relates is an exceedingly interesting one, and perfectly characteristic of the two men, or rather youths. The Mr. Polk referred to on that occasion, as associated with young Jackson, is the same that is named in my Memoir in relation to the manner of bringing out Genl Jackson as a candidate for the presidency, and then spoke of a "Genl Poke of Raleigh." In the truthfulness of his statement you may place the most implicit confidence—He is an intelligent, sensible, and highly reputable man. I know him well, having been a clerk in my office, when I lived in Washington, some 12 or 14 years, and during that whole time, I must do him the justice to say, that he faithfully and honestly discharged his duty, to my entire satisfaction. The occurrence referred to by Mr. Polk, is a beautiful incident in the life of the Genl, and was undoubtedly the debut of his military career, as it must have taken place the year before he was made a prisoner and received a sabre wound from the hand of a British officer for refusing to clean his boots when ordered to do so. I never heard the Genl speak of it myself, for the reason probably that he thought it was too small a matter to talk about, as there had been no fighting on the occasion.

I paid a visit about the middle of July to my son in law, George A. Washington, who lives in Robertson County on the Sulphur fork of the Red River. His residence is within 10 or 12 miles of the place where Genl Jackson and Dickerson fought their duel, which is on the middle fork of Red river, and as I had a great curiosity to see the very spot on which they fought, I proposed to Mr. Washington that we should visit it. To this he readily consented, and the next day we set out to see it, notwithstanding the intense heat of the weather. My son in law, fortunately had an old acquaintance and friend living within a

mile of the spot, and has been living there or in the immediate neighborhood, ever since the occurrance [sic] took place, and it was upon him we called to be our conductor, and to relate to us all the circumstances in connection with the duel, so far as he had any knowledge, or recollection of them. The name of the person alluded to is Jacob Smith, a plain, honest, and independent planter. He told me that at the time the duel was fought, he was doing business for a gentleman by the name of Miller, who lived on the public road leading from Springfield in Ten. to Russellsville in Ky. where it crosses the middle fork of Red river, and but a very short distance above the ground where the duel was fought. It was at this house, he informed us, that Jackson and his party slept the night before the fight. Not long after the arrival of the Genl., which was a little before sunset, Mr. Dickerson and his friends called and asked if they could get lodgings for the night, but they were told by Mr. Miller that he could not accomodate [sic] them-They enquired if there was any house in the neighborhood where they could be accommodated [sic]—They were advised by Mr. Miller to go to Mr. Harrisons, who lived about a mile below, on the opposite side of the river. After enquiring the way they left for Harrisons where, Mr. Smith informed us, they staid all night.

I enquired of Mr. Smith if he knew the Genl, or had ever seen him before? He said he had seen him once or twice, perhaps oftener, at Mr. Millers when on his way to Russellsville. I asked him if he knew what had brought him to Mr. Miller's that evening? He replied that he did not know the object of his visit until the next morning after the duel was fought, not a word having been said upon that subject the preceding evening, at least not within his hearing. I asked him how the Genl looked the night before the fight? Just as he always did was his reply, when he had seen him—he seemed to be as cheerful, if not more so, than any of his friends, he added. Mr. Smith said they rose early the next morning and passed over the opposite side of the river, but why or for what purpose, he did not know until they returned

After leaving Mr. Smiths house he conducted us to the spot where the duel was fought, which is on the North side of the middle fork of Red river, and but a very short distance below where we crossed it, and not more than a mile, if so much, North of the north boundary of Tennessee. It is situated in the midst of a rich bottom, and about 150 or 200 yards, I should think, from the bank of the river. The ground has been cleared, and is in cultivation. Mr. Smith took us to a large poplar stump, and said under that tree when it was standing, they fought—He was not in sight of the parties but heard the report of their pistols very distinctly. About noon of the same day, he informed us, he visited the ground. He found no one there, but signs of their having been there were very visible; He saw the ground as it had been

to Mr. Millers.

marked off and the prints of their feet at each of the marks, and, in addition to these, he saw, he said, where a paupau bush had been bent down and a pool of blood beneath it, which, he supposed, had been bent for the purpose of supporting Mr. Dickerson in a standing position, and the blood beneath it, had flown from his wound. From the description he gave us of the ground, the position of the parties must have been very nearly east and west, but which stood at the east, or which at the west end of the ground, he did not know, but the pool of blood, as pointed out by him, was nearest the west end, which he thought probably was the position Mr. Dickerson occupied. As stated above, the ground has been cleared (I found a crop of corn growing on it) which must greatly detract from its original interesting and romantic appearance. The eastern or upper portion of the bottom is still covered with large and lofty poplars, and a thick undergrowth of paupau bushes, the "woodman's axe" having not yet visited it.

After having satisfied my curiosity with regard to the ground upon which the duel was fought, I told Mr. Smith I should like to see the house to which Mr. Dickerson was taken after being wounded and in which he died. He remarked it was close by, not more than a half mile distant, and he would take me to it. After the fight, he said, his friends took him back to Mr. Harrisons, where he staid the night before, and that he remained there until he died, which was the second night after he received his wound. The house is a small frame, two stories high, and the property is now owned and occupied by a Mrs. Keller. On the first floor there are two rooms, but on the north end of the two story house there is a small addition, in the shape of an ell, which adjoins, or rather, is between the main building and the kitchen, and adjoins both, and it was in this room, Mr. Smith informed us, Mr. Dickerson died. It is a small, but rather comfortable looking room with one window, which is directly over the bed, or mattress upon which he laid. His wife was sent for soon after he received his wound, but did not get down in time to see him before he died. His corpse was taken up to Nashville the next day and was buried, I presume at his own residence.

When in the neighborhood of the place where the duel was fought several interesting anecdotes were related to me, connected with that affair. It is said, and the information was derived from Mr. Dickerson's second, or friend, that when he discharged his pistol and found after the smoke passed off, that the Genl was standing firm and erect with his keen piercing eye riveted on him, he, without seeming to be aware of what he was doing, fell back to [sic] or three steps from his position, and exclaimed in an undertone. "Great God have I missed him!" But the clear sharp voice of Genl Overton, the friend of Genl Jackson, ordering him to the mark, to the Mark, Sir, brought him quickly back to his position, and as he stepped up to it, he dropped his

right arm and pistol by his side with the view, as was supposed of covering his body.

Another anecdote was related to me by a gentleman of as high standing and character as any in our state, and who is as well acquainted with the people of the neighborhood where the duel was fought and the circumstances in relation to it, as any other man, probably, in Ten. or Ky.

He informed me that he knew an old man who lived but a short distance from the place and who happened on the morning of the duel, to be down in the same bottom, on some business, and while there he discovered some half dozen men engaged about something, but could not tell what. After looking at them awhile, and finding they were measuring ground and sticking down pegs, he very naturally came to the conclusion that they must be surveyors as the woods, at that day, was He however, concealing himself among the paupau full of them. bushes, determined to watch them and ascertain if they were not after stealing Mr. Harrison's land, as such men, at that time, were considered, by the less intelligent portion of our peoples, to be great rogues and land robbers. But when the parties took their positions, with pistols in their hands, and leveled at each other, he discovered that they were engaged on business of a very different character from what he had supposed—He then went on to relate to my informant, that after everything seemed to be arranged, and the parties prepared, he distinctly heard the word fire given, and instantly one of the pistols was discharged, and the man who fired, stepped back; but another man, he said, cried out in a loud and fierce voice, "back to the mark Sir," and as he stepped up to it, the other man with the pistol fired, and the person, at whom he fired, fell.

The gentleman from whom I got this account of what took place on the ground, assured me that he had no doubt of its correctness, nor have I, tho' I never heard of it until a few weeks past. When it was first related to me I confess that I was not a little surprised to find how strongly it corroberated [sic] and sustained General Overton's statement, made to me fifty years ago, and which I reported to you, verbally, at my house last winter.

There is one thing more in relation to this duel that I want to get, and which has been promised to me by a connection of mine living in New Orleans. I have been expecting it for some time and should have written to you long since could I have gotten it.—It is said to be a copy of "the terms of the duel" in Genl Jackson's handwriting. I received a letter from my connection dated the 19th last month, in which he says "I have written to him (the person who has the document) today and do not doubt that you will soon hear from him." But I have heard nothing more upon the subject. They are too much taken up with politics in Louisiana just now to attend to anything else. A son

of old Genl Overton, who is a judge in Louisiana, also, I am told has some important letters upon this subject. He too has been written to, but I have received no answer from him—I have determined to wait no longer, and, as I shall be going to town in the morning I will take this letter with me and drop it in the post office. I have been some two or three days writing it, and I am pretty well fatigued, and I dare say you will find yourself as much so, before you can read it thro'. If you find mistakes, as undoubtedly you will, you must pass over them, or correct them, for I have no time to do it, as my horse is saddled and been waiting an hour for me, and now with my best wishes for your success, and kind regards to Mrs. Parton, whose acquaintance I hope, someday before long, to have the pleasure of making, I beg you to believe me very truly and

Sincerely yours W. B. Lewis

P. S. I came into town this morning for the purpose of mailing my letter to you, and have just learned from a friend that he had seen it stated in a New York paper, that your life of Genl Jackson would be out in November. I confess I was rather incredulous, as to the correctness of the information, Because I did not think it possible that you could write, in so short a time, such a work as the friends of the Genl here expect from you. They count upon seeing a work as eleborately prepared and written, as your Biography of Col Burr-a work that will be not only an enduring monument of your own high character as an able and elegant writer, but also of the name and character of Genl Jackson. I beg you, my dear Mr. Parton, to write me on the receipt of this Letter, and let me know whether the information is correct. I have commenced writing an account of the split between the Genl and Mr. Calhoun, but it will be impossible for me to get thro' with it in time for your book, if it is expected to go to press as soon as November. It is my desire to give a full and complete account of that affair, as I think it will make an exceedingly interesting document.

Sept. 10th 59.—

WBL

B

Nashville, Octr 15th 1859

My DEAR Mr. PARTON,

Your two last letters have been received, and there is a passage or two in the one of the 26th (the last) that I desire to make a few remarks upon, but I do not intend on occasion to bore you with a long letter—Time is too precious for that, as I am afraid it will reach you too late for your *Pioneer Vol*—First then, about the Dickerson duel—Gen Overton told me that Genl Jackson did not desire to have a personal difficulty with Mr. Dickerson, and in order to avoid it, requested him to call on his father-in-law, Mr. Joseph Erwin, and get him to talk to

his son in law (Mr D) and advise him to quit abusing him, at the same time, that if he did not desist, he would be compelled to call him out. Genl Overton said that he did call on Mr. Erwin, as requested by the Genl, and earnestly advised him to talk to Mr. Dickerson and get him to forbear speaking of the Genl as he had been in the habit of doing for some time past. He left, he said, with assurance that he would get Mr. D. if possible, to say nothing more about the Genl and Mrs. Jackson. Subsequent events showed, however, that he either did not interfere or, if he did, that he had no influence over his son in law, for not long after, he published a most violent and abusive piece in one of the Nashville papers against him, more violent and malignant in its character than anything that had been previously published.

This determined the Genl's course—finding that Mr. Dickerson meant to press it in his abuse of him, he sent him a challenge by the hands of Genl Overton, which resulted in a fight and the death of Mr. Dickerson. There is very litle doubt, I think that the Genls pacific course was considered by Mr. D. as evidence of cowardice, and he was, therefore, determined to push him to the wall, and did not

discover his mistake until it was too late to correct it.

In the then state of society here, and under all the circumstances of the case, if the Genl had not challenged, and fought Mr. Dickerson, it would have ruined him forever, in the estimation of the people of this state. No one would ever have heard of those splendid victories he achieved, a few years after, in fighting the battles of his country, if he had failed to call Mr. Dickerson out.—Does anyone imagine that he could have succeeded in raising those magnificent volunteer corps of militia, which he marched to battle and to victory, if he had suffered himself, on the occasion referred to above, to be branded as a coward? No, my dear sir, not one of them would have been found in his ranks, for men will never voluntarily place themselves under the command of a coward, when fighting is to be done:—These are considerations which, I think, should and will have much weight in the public estimation, if they be not a complete justification.

With regard to the cases of Armbrister and Arbuthnot, I confess I do not know much about them. I was not with the Genl in the campaign, nor have I ever seen the evidence that was taken by the Court of Enquiry—By the by, you speak of it as a Court Martial, but it was simply a court of Enquiry, which is essentially different from a Court Martial—Its duty is to collect evidence etc. to be laid before the Commanding Genl, or Secretary of War, for his action, and has no power of itself to pass sentence, or inflict punishment. This is a distinction which it may, possibly, be of some importance, in this case, to observe.

I have written to my friend, Col. Arthur P. Hayne, at Charleston, who was with Genl Jackson in that campaign, and was Inspector Genl of the Southern Division of the U. S. Army, to furnish me with all the

documents, or other information he may have in relation to the trial and execution of those two unfortunate Englishmen; and to enable him to see and understand more fully what is desired I enclosed to him an extract from your letter to me.—I have also written to Blair to see Genl Jessup and get him to make a thoro' search of the files and records of the War Dept., and if he finds any letters or documents which may throw light upon those cases to send them to you. Blair has all the Genl's papers, public and private, and he may find something among them, perhaps, that will be important—Those are important cases, as regards the Genls character, and Blair ought to feel, and I have no doubt does feel a great interest in the matter.

As regards the Genls birthplace I have no doubt that your idea about it is correct. When I found the North Carolinians, living along the state were claiming the honor of his being a native of their state, it occurred to me, as it did to you, that in running the line, between the two states, the house in which the Genl was born might have been left on the north side of it, and I intended to make that suggestion to you in my last letter, but forgot it. All that I contended for was that he was neither born in Ireland, nor at sea, nor in Virginia, nor in Kentucky, but in the Waxsaw [sic]-Settlement, which was considered a part of So. Carolina when the Genl left there for what was then called the far West. I have written to South Carolina to get information, as to the time of running that line, and if it shall be found to have been run, since the Genl left the Waxsaw Settlement, which must have been about 1784, the mystery will be solved at once. It is my impression that he never visited that neighborhood from the time he first left it, at least I never heard him speak of having done so, and I am almost confident that he never did. If the line has been run since he left, the probability is, that he was ignorant of its having left the house in which he was born, in North Carolina, to the day of his death.

I have got thro' with my Calhoun document, and I think there are portions of it that will be read with interest. It is long, but you can use so much of it only, as you may think will be [of] interest to the public; I want to look over it to count mistakes, and, it may be to make some change, or modifications. I will send it on in a few days, in time I hope for your second volume where, according to your arrangement,

it will properly belong.

If I get anything from either Col. Hayne or Blair, in relation to the trial of the two Englishmen, that I think may be useful, I will enclose it to you—and in the meantime I beg you to believe me very truly

Your Friend W. B. Lewis

To

James Parton Esqr New York C

[Single sheet notation of W. B. Lewis]

All that Mr Clay and his friends desired of the Bank was to make the application in order to give Congress an opportunity of passing a Bill to be sent to the Genl for his approval or rejection. If he refused to approve, it was believed that Penna., having the Bank in Phila., would desert him, and if on the other hand, he should sign the Bill, the South, being opposed to the Bank upon Constitutional grounds, would desert him, and that, in either event he must be defeated. It was a deep and well laid scheme, but it failed for the reason that the people preferred Genl Jackson to the Bank—even Penna. gave him a majority, at the election of twenty five thousand votes!

D

NASHVILLE, July 28th, 1860

My DEAR MR. PARTON:

I enclosed to you, last fall, a letter I received from my old friend Col. A. P. Hagen who requested me to copy it, and, after forwarding the copy to you, to return the original to him. Not being able to read it on account of its illegibility, I sent the original letter to you, thinking that as your eyes were younger and better than mine you might be enabled to discipher [sic] it, but I am not sure whether I requested you to return it to me after perusing it. As I am not able to find it among my letters and as I have received, a few days ago, a letter from the Col. requesting me to return it to him, I wish you would look over your papers and, if you can lay your hand on it, have the goodness to send it to me at your earliest convenience. He says he has for many years been in the habit of preserving all such documents for the perusal and future use of his family, if they should be inclined to read and use them.

I cannot, my friend, write you a long letter at this time—the weather is too hot and oppressive to do so—For the last two weeks the thermometer, which hangs in the centre of my hall, has ranged from 95 to 102 degrees, but still there are one or two passages in your letter I feel that I ought, in justice to the persons concerned, say a few words in explanation. In relation to the acts of the Genls administration, you say there are two things you cannot justify or ?—"the rotation in office and the removal of the Deposits."

What my opinion is upon the subject of the rotation policy, you have seen in the extract which I enclosed you from my letter to Genl. Jackson, and it is not necessary therefore to say anything more in relation to that matter—upon that subject we do not differ, nor do we differ upon the other. I regretted exceedingly that the Genl thought his duty to the country required he should take that step, not on account

of sympathy for the Bank, but because I did not desire to see him exercise a power which was thought, by some of the ablest and best men of the country, to be doubtful—and because, also, that I deemed it unnecessary, even if he had the power, as his term of service extended twelve months beyond the time for which the Bank had been charted, and by the use of the veto power, (a power which he undoubtedly possessed) he could at any time have prevented the renewal of its charter. On intimating that I had no sympathy for the Bank I do not wish to be understood as belonging, at that time, to the anti Bank party. Far from it I had been decidedly friendly to that Institution, but when I saw it take the field, in a political contest under the lead of Mr. Clay and his friends to defeat the election of Genl Jackson, I thought it was time to put an end to its existence, by refusing to renew its charter. It is possible that some of Mr. Clays friends may deny the truthfulness of this charge, but the facts were at the time and, perhaps, still are susceptible of proof. They came to my knowledge mainly thro' Louis McLane, Secretary of the Treasury Dept., and Genl Cadwalader, an old and influential member of the Board of directors of the Bank. When it had been resolved on by the Board of directors to apply for a recharter, Genl Cadwalader was dispatched to Washington for the purpose of ascertaining whether a Bill could be got through Congress. After satisfying himself upon that subject, he then called upon Mr. McLane and the President. I am not aware that he had any conversation with General Jackson upon the subject, tho' I think he had not, but I do know he had a long, full, and rather unpleasant one with Mr. McLane who related the occurance [sic] to me the next day. The Secretary was quite indignant at the conduct of the Bank and its agent, and did not hesitate to express his displeasure, in no very measured terms, tho they were old personal friends. He remarked to him that he had been in Washington a week or ten days mingling with the members of Congress with the view of ascertaining their opinions upon the subject of rechartering the U.S. Bank, and, after being assured that a Bill could be got thro both Houses, he comes, not to consult or advise with the Finantial [sic] Minister of the Government upon that important measure, but merely to let him know that Congress was in favor of it, as if neither the president nor himself had anything to do with it! And now, he farther remarked to Genl Cadwalader, I wish you and the Bank distinctly to understand that, altho in my present report to Congress, I have expressed myself as strongly in favor of the Bank as I possibly could, yet if any such Bill shall be sent to the President during the present sessions of Congress, as one of his constitutional advisors, I will advise him to veto it. What, Mr. McLane, asked Genl C., is the Bank to do? Genl Jackson is known to be opposed to the Bank and if he should be reelected, there will be no hope of having it recharted, as his second term will extend a full year beyond the Banks Charter.—And, on the other hand, Mr. Clay and his friends say that if we do not apply at this session for a recharter, we need not look to them for assistance hereafter. But, notwithstanding the remarks of Mr. McLane to Genl Cadwalader and his declared intention of advising the President to veto any Bill that might be sent to him passed at that session of Congress, it was resolved by the Board of Directors to make the application. Accordingly they sent up their Memorial to Congress soon after the return of their agent to Philadelphia, it was presented to the Senate by Judge Wilkins, one of the Senators from the State of Penna., a Bill was passed in due time and sent to the President for his approval, but which he refused to sign, as everybody knew would be the case.

X In addition to what is stated above if you will take the trouble to look up and read the address of the Whig Convention which sat in Baltimore in December 1831, you will find strong corroborative evidence of the determination on the part of Mr. Clay and his friends, to compel the Bank to take part in the approaching presidential election—You will find on reading the address that the convention strongly urges the propriety of the Bank making application to Congress, at their then (?) session, for a renewal of its charter! As ordered by the convention, which had just nominated Mr. Clay as their candidate for the presidency to be run in opposition to Genl Jackson, application was made.—

As further illustration of the highly exceptional conduct of the Bank and its Whig friends, in the election of 1832, I will relate conversations I had with Mr. Biddle, before and after the election, in relation to the proposed application by the Bank to Congress for a renual of its charter.

In the fall of 1831, about the 20th of November I think, Genl Jackson requested me to go to Phila., and be present at the marriage of his son, which took place about that time. I accordingly repaired to that city of brotherly love on a very pleasant mission, and witnessed the marriage ceremony as requested. Being detained, however, in the city the following day, I embraced the opportunity of calling on Mr. Biddle at the Bank for the purpose of having a conversation with him upon the subject of the proposed application for a recharter—I thought the relations existing between us would authorize such a liberty. commenced the conversation with him by remarking that I discovered some of the leading Whig papers were advising his Bank to apply to Congress for a renewal of its charter at its approaching session, etc. This I told him would be, in my opinion, a great mistake on the part of the Bank, if it should act upon any such advice-In fact, that it might prove highly injurious to its future prospects and usefulness. Whatever the motion of the Board of Directors might be, I added, it would be considered by the country a political movement on their part, with the view of influencing the presidential election then pending, and

which would occasion much excitement before its close, I had no doubt. X

Mr. Biddle listened to me attentively, and when I had got thro' with the few remarks I had to make, he said "it is due to myself, Major Lewis, to state, in the first place, that the course of the newspapers, to which you refer, has not been prompted by me, nor by any other member of the Board so far as I know—and, in the (place?) I beg leave to assure you that I have not the slightest intention of advising any such course, nor do I believe the Board is, or will be in favor of taking any such step." These assurances were given with great apparent sincerity, the truthfulness of which I had no reason to doubt, nor did I doubt, and yet, in two short months about, the Board of directors did make application to Congress for a renual [sic] of their charter. A Bill to that effect was proposed and sent to the President for his approval, but which he returned to Congress with his veto message, as everybody supposed would be the case.—At least I had no doubt of it at the time even that I was warning Mr. Biddle of the danger of such a course, tho I did not feel myself authorized to say so to him.

What could have caused this sudden change in the policy of the Bank? For the solution I must again refer you to the address of the Whig convention which assembeld at Baltimore about the middle of (Dec.?)—and, also to the remarks of Genl. Cadwaldader [sic] to Mr. Secretary McLane; and to what Mr. Biddle related to me the first time I saw him after the veto, by Genl. Jackson, of the Bank Bill. On that occasion I reminded him of his assurance to me that the Bank would not apply to Congress at its approaching session for a renewal of its charter. He said he recollected it well, and was perfectly sincere in which he said to me—He repeated that he was opposed to the application, but that he had been over ruled by the Board of Directors!

Who then, I ask, was the author, or authors, of the Banks overthrow? If the country did, or has sustained an injury by its suppression, upon whose shoulders should the responsibility rest? Upon Genl Jackson? Not at all, but rather upon the shoulders of those who forced the Bank to take the field against him politically, in a life and death struggle. It is true the Genl did slay the Monster, as it was then called, but it was done in self defense and was perfectly justifiable. In this set he was sustained, I am happy to say, not only by his friends, but by the country also-The leaders of the Whig party should be held responsible for the loss of the Bank if a loss it has been, and not Genl. Jackson. If the Bank had waited patiently until after the election, and then made application for a renewal of its charter, the Genl. would have been willing, I have no doubt, to sign (?), with some few not a bill that should have been satisfactory to the Bank.—Such an one, at least, as was recommended by the Legislature of Pennsylvania. But from the moment the Bank sent up its memorial, asking for a renual [sic] of its charter, he resolved to put it down if within his power, and remarked to me, the morning after it was presented to the Senate by Judge Wilkins, under much excitement, "that if a Bill should be sent to him, he would veto it, if he were certain of being sent to the scaffold for the act, in ten minutes thereafter." It was a great and most fatal mistake on the part of the friends of the Bank.

I have stated above, that the Genls. friends, without a single exception, so far as I now recollect, supported his veto message; but that was not the case with regard to his removal of the deposits from the U. S. Bank. Many of them, and I among the number, regretted the act. It occasioned much excitement thro' the whole country, and at one time, it was feared, it might produce a split among his own friends, but happily an open rupture was avoided. Some two or three years after its occurrence, I drew up a pretty full and accurate account of the whole affair, and regret that I did not show it to you when in Nashville. It was written whilst still under some excitement and, as might be supposed under such circumstances, it is rather too severe, as regards some of the actors in the great political drama, and I did not desire to have it published until I could modify and somewhat soften down the asperities of the language. That is the reason why I have never permitted any use to be made of it, but still I think some extracts might have been taken from it that would be read with interest, and, at the same time, without giving offence to anyone.

I am happy to inform you, my dear friend, that my health has somewhat improved, but I regret to say that that has not been the case with my vision.—I still see imperfectly, so much so, that I have to

employ, at times, an amanuensis to do my writing.

For the many kind and flattering expressions contained in your letters I beg you to accept my sincere thanks—whether deserving or not, they are not the less appreciated, by very truly and sincerely,

Your friend, W. B. Lewis

E

Notes and Corrections on the Third Volume of Parton's Life of Jackson

By W. B. Lewis

Page 17th—line 26th—after the word great the word commanders should, it seems to me, be inserted.

Page 22d—line 31, Major Maney should be "Major Maury," who was a relative of the learned and distinguished Lieutenant of the U.S. Navy by that name.

Page 35, and 5th line-John M Eaton should be John H Eaton

Page 41, line 20th—Governor Edmonds of Illinois, should be Gov. Edwards.

Page 48, line 16th summer of 1814 should be sum'r of 1824

Page 108, line 19th, "the gen'l (?) said that early one morning Mr. Clay called on him at his lodgings, which was quite an unusual circumstance, and, after a few compliments had passed, Mr. Clay observed, "I have no doubt of your election now." The meeting took place, not at the Gen'l's lodgings, as stated by Mr. Sloan, but on the Penna. Avenue where he met Mr Clay on foot-Mr. Clay inquired of him if he had heard the result of the election in Louisiana. The Genl told him he had not. Mr. Clay then remarked that he had, and that the votes of that State had been divided between him (the Genl) and Mr. Adams, and that he had no doubt he (the Genl) would now be elected. The other portions of Mr. Sloans naritive [sic] are substantially correct, and correspond with the situation of that meeting as given to me by the Genl himself soon after his return to Nashville in the Spring of 1825. I have no doubt the interview took place, and what was said on the occasion was correctly stated by the Genl, but the inference drawn by him of the motives of Mr Clay could only be known by Mr Clay himself.

Page 164, and at the beginning of chapter 15, it is stated, line 10th, "His inaugural address, the joint production of himself, Major Lewis, and Henry Lee was written at the House of Major Lewis near Nashville. But one slight alteration was made after the General reached the seat of Government. General Jackson furnished the leading ideas. Major Lewis made some suggestions; Henry Lee gave it form and style." The Biographer in saying that the address was written at the house of Major Lewis is mistaken. It was written at the Hermitage. A few days before the General left for the city of Washington, he wrote a note to me, requesting me to ride up to the Hermitage the next day. His request was complied with. A short time after I reached the Hermitage, Major Lee who was residing in the neighborhood at that time also came. The Genl remarked to me that he had been preparing an inaugural address to be delivered on the 4th of March, and that he wished me and Major Lee to read it, and make such suggestions and alterations in it, in conjunction with Mr. Donelson, as we might think it required. He requested Mr. Donelson to take us to his office, and place the address in our hands. This was done—It was in the General's own hand writing, and was carefully read and examined by us. Some few modifications and alterations were suggested by myself and Lee. The Genl examined these, and adopted some of them, rejected the others. He then requested Mr. Lee to draw up the address in proper form, as thus modified.

In this shape he took it on with him to Washington, without showing it to any other person, until he reached that city. It was said the address had been written by a New York gentleman, at that time a member of Congress: but that is not true. The gentleman spoken of did see it before it was delivered, and suggested some alterations in it, but not one of them was adopted by the Genl. The only alteration made in it was the one suggested by the Bioggrapher, after the Genl. reached the seat of Government.

Page 294—The date of Genl Jackson's letter to Judge Overton should

be 1829, instead of 1830 as printed.

Page 297—Major Lewis, to Col. L. C. Stanbaugh—It should have

been printed Col. Sam'l. C. Stambaugh.

Page 420—Line 4th.—"About the middle of Augt. the President, accompanied by Mr. Blair and other friends, left Washington for a visit to the Hermitage and did not return until the 19th of October &c." This is a mistake—The first visit Mr. Blair and the only one I believe, ever made to the Hermitage was in the summer of 1843.

Page 321—line 13—"and which has never been revised &c." It should

be reversed.

Page 319-line 7, Captain Barnes, should be Capt. Barner.

Ist Vol.—page 120, last line of the page, it is stated that Nashville is 183 miles from Jonesboro"—it should be 283 miles. Page 121, four lines from the bottom, "Thomas Learey, the clerk of the Superior Court &c." I never knew any Learey by that name. It should be, I think, Bennet Leary who was, at a later day, one of the Judges of the Circuit Court Ten.

Page 158—Genl Daniel Smith, is said to be the brother in law of Genl Jackson—This is a mistake—the son of Genl Smith having married a niece of Mrs. Jackson, was the only connection existing between the families—a brother of Mrs. Jackson (the father of

Major A. J. Donelson) married a daughter of Genl Smith.

III. LETTER FROM HENRY S. RANDALL TO JAMES PARTON ON JEFFERSON AND THE "DUSKY SALLY STORY"

The following letter, explaining the "Dusky Sally Story," was partially used in Parton's biography; the excerpt included is indicated by square brackets. Randall was most co-operative with his successor, and gave him a few ledger pages in Jefferson's handwriting which were subsequently framed. Parton's debt to the three volumes so painstakingly written by Randall was enormous. The generosity of the early biographer, as indicated by the following communication, was unstinting.

COURTLAND VILLAGE, N. Y., June 1, 1868

DEAR SIR-

The "Dusky Sally Story"—the story that Mr. Jefferson kept one of his slaves, (Sally Henings) as his mistress and had children by her, was once extensively believed by respectable men, and I believe both John Quincy Adams and our own Bryant sounded their poetical lyres

on this very poetical subject!

Walking about mouldering Monticello one day with Col. T. J. Randolph (Mr. Jefferson's oldest grandson) he showed me a smoke blackened and sooty room in one of the collonades, and informed me it was Sally Henings' room. He asked me if I knew how the story of Mr. Jefferson's connection with her originated. I told him I did not. "There was a better excuse for it, said he, than you might think: she had children which resembled Mr. Jefferson so closely that it was plain that they had his blood in their veins." He said in one case the resemblance was so close, that at some distance or in the dusk the slave, dressed in the same way, might have been mistaken for Mr. Jefferson. -He said in one instance, a gentleman dining with Mr. Jefferson looked so startled as he raised his eyes from the latter to the servant behind him, that his discovery of the resemblance was so perfectly obvious to all. Sally Hening was a house servant and her children were brought up house servants—so that the likeness between master and slave was blazoned to all the multitudes who visited this political mecca.

Mr. Jefferson had two nephews, Peter Carr and Samuel Carr whom he brought up in his house. They were the sons of Jefferson's sister and her husband Dabney Carr, that young and brilliant orator described by Wirt, who shone so conspiculously in the dawn of the Revolution, but who died in 17(?). Peter was peculiarly gifted and amiable. Of Samuel I know less. But he became a man of repute and sat in the State Senate of Virginia. Col. Randolph informed me that Sally Henings was the mistress of Peter, and her sister Betsey the

mistress of Samuel—and from these connections sprang the progeny which resembled Mr. Jefferson. Both the Hening girls were light colored and decidedly good looking. The Colonel said their connection with the Carrs was perfectly notorious at Monticello, and scarcely disguised by the latter—never disavowed by them. Samuel's proceed-

ings were particularly open.

[Col. Randolph informed me that there was not the shadow of suspicion that Mr. Jefferson in this or any other instance had commerce with female slaves. At the periods when these Carr children were born, he, Col. Randolph, had charge of Monticello. He gave all the general directions, gave out their clothes to the slaves, etc., etc. He said Sally Hening was treated, dressed, etc., exactly like the rest. He said Mr. Jefferson never locked the door of his room by day: and that he (Col. Randolph) slept within sound of his breathing at night. He said he had never seen a motion, or a look, or a circumstance which led him to suspect for an instant that there was a particle more of familiarity between Mr. Jefferson and Sally Henings than between nim and the most repulsive servant in the establishment—and that no person ever living at Monticello dreamed of such a thing. With Betsy Hening whose children also resembled him, his habitual meeting, was less frequent, and the chance of suspicion still less, and his connection (connexion) with her was never indeed alleged by any of our northern politicians or poets.

[Col. Randolph said that he had spent a good share of his life closely about Mr. Jefferson—at home and on journeys—in all sorts of circumstances and he fully believed him chaste and pure—as "immaculate

a man as God ever created."

Mr. Jefferson's oldest daughter, Mrs. Gov. Randolph, took the Dusky Sally stories much to heart. But she never spoke to her sons but once on the subject. Not long before her death she called two of them-the Colonel and George Wythe Randolph-to her. She asked the Colonel if he remembered when "----- Henings (the slave who most resembled Mr. Jefferson) was born."] He said he could answer by referring to the book containing the list of slaves. [He turned to the book and found that the slave was born at the time supposed by Mrs. Randolph. She then directed her sons attention to the fact that Mr. Jefferson and Sally Henings could not have met-were far distant from each other-for fifteen months prior to such birth. She bade her sons (to) remember this fact, and always to defend the character of their grandfather. It so happened when I was afterwards examining an old account book of the Jeffersons I came pop on the original entry of this slaves birth; and I was then able (to know) from well known circumstances to prove the fifteen months separation-] but those circumstances have faded from my memory. I have no doubt I could recover them however did Mr. Jefferson's vindication in the

least depend upon them.

Colonel Randolph said that a visitor at Monticello dropped a newspaper from his pocket or accidentally left it. After he was gone, he (Colonel Randolph) opened the paper and found some very insulting remarks about Mr. Jefferson's mulatto children. The Colonel said he felt provoked. Peter and Samuel Carr were lying not far off under a shade tree. He took the paper and put it in Peter's hands, pointing out the article. Peter read it, tears coursing down his cheeks, and then handed it to Samuel. Samuel also shed tears. Peter exclaimed "Ar'nt you and I a couple of — pretty fellows to bring this disgrace on poor old uncle who has always fed us! We ought to be — , by

[I could give fifty more facts were there time and were there any need of it, to show Mr. Jefferson's innocence of this and all similar

offenses against propriety.]

I asked Col. Randolph why on earth Mr. Jefferson did [not] put these slaves who looked like him out of the public sight by sending them to his Befond estate or elsewhere.—He said Mr. Jefferson never betrayed the least consciousness of the resemblance—and although he (Col. Randolph) and he had no doubt his mother, would have been very glad to have them thus removed, that both and all venerated Mr. Jefferson too deeply to broach such a topic to him. What suited him, satisfied them. Mr. Jefferson was deeply attached to the Carrs—especially to Peter. He was extremely indulgent to them and the idea of watching them for faults or vices probably never occurred to him.

Do you ask why I did not state, or at least hint the above facts in my Life of Jefferson? I wanted to do so. But Colonel Randolph, in this solitary case alone, prohibited me from using at my discretion the information he furnished me with. When I rather pressed him on the point, he said, pointing to the family graveyard, "You are not bound to prove a negation. If I should allow you to take Peter Carr's corpse into Court and plead guilty over it to shelter Mr. Jefferson, I should not dare again to walk by his grave: he would rise and spurn me." I am exceedingly glad Col. Randolph did overrule me in this particular. I should have made a shameful mistake. If I had unnecessarily defended him (and it was purely unnecessary to offer any defense) at the expense of a dear nephew—and a noble man—hating (?) a single folly.—

I write this currente calamo, and you will not understand that in telling what Col. Randolph and others said, I claim to give their precise language. I give it as I now recall it. I believe I hit at least the essential purport and spirit of it in every case.

Do you wonder that the above explanations were not made by Mr. Jefferson's friends when the old Federal Party were hurling their vil-

lanies at him for keeping a Congo Harem! Nobody could have furnished a hint of explanation outside the family. The secrets of an old Virginia Manor house were like the secrets of an Old Norman Castle. Dr. Dungleson and Professor Tucker had lived years near Mr. Jefferson in the University, and were often at Monticello. They saw what others saw. But Dr. D told me that neither he nor Prof T. ever heard the subject named in Virginia. An awe and veneration was felt for Mr. Jefferson among his neighbors which in their view rendered it shameful to ever talk about his name in such a connexion. Dr. D. told me that he never heard of Col. Randolph talking with anyone on the subject but me. But he said in his own secret mind he had always believed the matter stood just as Col. Randolph explained it to me.

You ask if I will not write a cheap Life of Jefferson of 600 pages, to go into families who will not purchase a larger work. I some years ago commenced such a condensed biography. I suspended the work when the storm of Civil War burst over the land. I have not again resumed it. I may yet do so hereafter—I have been strongly urged to the work by a prominent publishing house, and if I find time I may

again mount my old hobby.

I must again express my regret that I cannot send you a fine autograph letter of Mr. Jefferson on some interesting topic—but I am stripped down to those his family expected me to keep. But I send you some characteristic leaves—one from his draft of his Parliamentary law.

Very Truly Yours, HENRY S. RANDALL

JAMES PARTON, ESQ.

IV. THE PARTON-WHITMAN CONTROVERSY CONTINUED

The immediate aftermath of the Whitman controversy involved Fanny Fern more than her husband. Three weeks following the satisfaction of the judgment, Whitman forgot his once professed admiration for Fanny Fern and wrote "One genuine woman is worth a dozen Fanny Ferns" in an article on Free Academies.¹ The unchivalrous thrust perhaps eased his feelings in the only contemporary note on the subject. Years later Horace Traubel, Whitman's Boswell, asked the poet if Parton had been responsible for the continuing recrimination. Whitman retorted, "I don't think so; maybe: hardly: there were other elements in the story—venom, jealousies, capacities; they played a big part: and if I may say it, women: a woman certainly—maybe women: they kept alive what I felt James Parton would let die, left dead."²

James Parton was content to have the whole affair fade into oblivion. Yet the fallen leaves were stirred by the wind of rumor. Fanny Fern became the center of unwarranted suspicion. In 1869, at the request of William O'Connor, Whitman wrote his explanation of the matter setting forth his dealings with Parton. Again in 1888 he recounted the dispute to Traubel in an effort to ward off criticism; the Parton episode seemed to fan a persecution complex. Walt Whitman spread his life before his friends in an amazingly frank, free fashion. and accordingly every incident grew with the retelling, was magnified out of its natural proportion. Whitman blamed Fanny Fern for influencing her husband, while intimates of Whitman piled up their own partisan testimony against Mrs. Parton. Mrs. O'Connor even intimated that Fanny Fern did not share her husband's personal antipathy to the poet. This O'Connor letter has been quoted and requoted by all Whitman defenders.3 So far, however, the Parton-Whitman controversy had not been made public.

In 1893, two years after Parton's death, Julius H. Ward published his article on the biographer in the New England Magazine. Here the long-silenced charge against the poet was first publicly mentioned though his name was not given. No more exact explanation was ever made in print, and the matter might have been dropped so far as either

¹ Walt Whitman, I Sit and Look Out: Editorials from the Brooklyn Daily Times by Walt Whitman. Selected and edited by Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 54.

² Traubel, III, p. 236.

Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades (Boston, 1931), p. 178.
New England Magazine, N.S. VII (Jan., 1893), p. 631.

Parton or his family were concerned. Early in 1897, however, William Sloane Kennedy, the good friend of the then deceased poet, heard stories of the old dispute going the rounds of Boston's literary circles. Accordingly he wrote the Parton family for confirmation of the story. Miss Ethel Parton replied, retelling the events as she knew them and defending her uncle against accusations which Kennedy wrote were "slanderous and libelous." The affair was kept open by two factions. Kennedy, T. B. Harned, and Whitman idolators on the one hand, and certain anti-Whitmanites on the other. Kennedy had first heard of Parton's experience from Harriet Prescott Spofford, good friend and neighbor of Parton in Newburyport, who had been told the early incident by Parton himself. Similarly, Kennedy learned, the incident had been recounted to Julius Ward and Col. T. W. Higginson.⁵ There was nothing unusual in Parton's reminiscence of his personal association with Walt Whitman. In a town the size of Newburyport it was a natural sort of anecdote or literary gossip which might be related to friends and neighbors. Parton himself considered the time past for incrimination.

New Englanders seldom saw the good in non-New England writers. T. W. Higginson was largely responsible for the repetition of the story in a Cambridge paper criticizing Whitman for building a costly tomb when he could not pay his honest debts. The article, according to Kennedy, was written by Higginson as part of a literary feud with O'Connor which finally resulted in aspersions cast on the memory of Whitman. The turn which the quarrel had taken was most unfortunate. The almost forgotten episode was fanned into flames as fiery discussion raged in the Boston *Transcript*. Temporarily quelled when W. S. Kennedy was forced to write a letter of apology tempering some remarks, the heated pen with which he wrote his attack on Parton and his friends left a seared surface. What is most important is that all these stories and disputes were published after Parton's death.

Later Whitman enthusiasts, biographers, and editors kept alive the coals of dispute and suspicion. Few monographs on different phases of the poet's life and works have failed to include some account of the unpleasant financial deal, while Mrs. Parton's one-time honest friend-

⁵ William Sloane Kennedy to Mrs. James Parton, Feb. 10, 1897 (Parton Collection). In this letter Kennedy reviewed his sources of information and suggested that it was probably a case of mistaken identity, and if not, that the charge was "slanderous and libelous."

[&]quot; Ibid.

⁷ Boston Transcript, 1897-1898. Two letters of Kennedy, and one by A. P. Stafford, relative to the Parton-Whitman affair. Clippings (Parton Collection).

ship for the Brooklyn poet has been the source of unnecessary and unfounded rumor.8

For a man to have confidants is human; James Parton had many. He generously gave honor where honor was due. Frederic R. Guernsey wrote John Burroughs in 1878⁹ thanking him for Whitman data, and concluded his letter, "I met James Parton, the biographer the other day in his home in Newburyport, and we fell to talking of our great men. I asked him his opinion of Walt Whitman, of whom he said: 'He has real Homeric touches in his poems.' But he seems to have some personal ill-feeling against Mr. Whitman. However, Mr. Parton, though one of the most genial of men, has vehement likes and dislikes. He is very busy on a life of Voltaire, and his library, in the sitting room of one of our square New England houses, has a corner devoted to innumerable books on the French Philosopher. 'It is to Voltaire,' said Mr. Parton, 'that we owe the privilege of talking freely on all subjects.'"

⁸ Of the most recent writings on Whitman, Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades; I Sit and Look Out, and New York Dissected, all bring up the unpleasant and unfounded charge of admiration by Fanny Fern of Whitman. The editors of I Sit and Look Out mistakenly pushed supposition too far, suggesting that Mr. Walter, a character in Ruth Hall, was perhaps Walt Whitman.

^o Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades, pp. 177-178. Letter quoted Frederic R. Guernsey to John Burroughs, dated July, 1878. In possession of the late

Clifton Joseph Furness.

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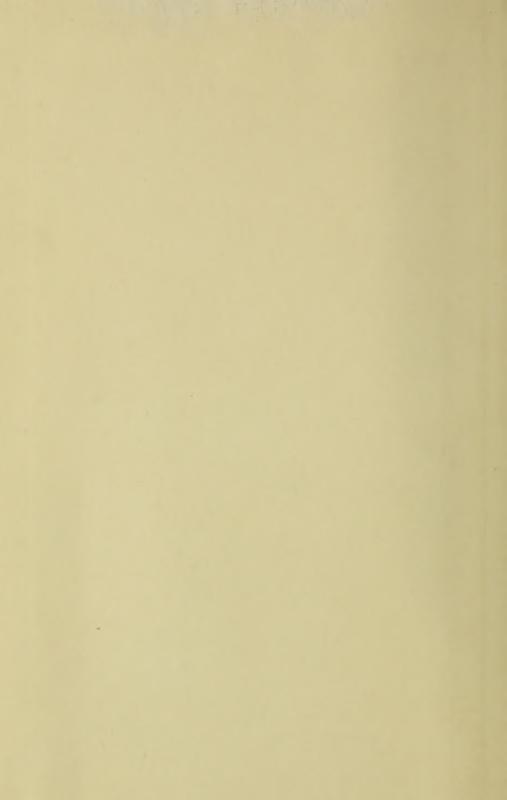
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